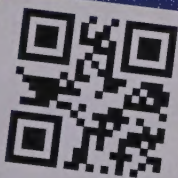


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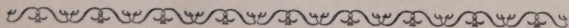
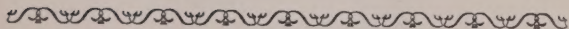
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THE
GRACE OF LAMBS

THE
GRACE OF LAMBS

Stories by

MANUEL KOMROFF



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TO MY WIFE

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THE
GRACE OF LAMBS

THE
GRACE OF LAMBS

I

IN spite of his vice, one could see that he was a man of education and refinement. Of all the people whom I met in China, his scope of vision was the greatest.

It was in a Shanghai hotel that I first saw him, as he passed from the kitchen through the dining-room and eyed me carefully over his bent spectacles. His white coat was badly soiled, one pocket ripped open, and his eyes seemed to look through you rather than at you. Presently he returned and stood before my table.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I'd like to talk to you. . . . You look like a scholar and a gentleman. It's hard to find gentlemen in China—all business men and engineers. I wouldn't talk to them myself . . . nothing to say to them." Quite evidently he had been drinking.

"Been in China long?" I inquired.

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"Not long — only eight years. . . . But that's long enough. Four years teaching, three years research, and one year doing nothing — just nothing but drinking. They brought me over from England and then sacked me. I drink too much. That's well and good; but I never missed a class, and not one of them knows my subjects. Told me himself — the Chancellor — that the only reason they kept me as long as they did was because my name and titles looked good in their catalogue — not another Doctor of Science in China, and besides that I am a Fellow of the Royal Society, and I have my B.A., M.A., and Sc.D. . . . Looked good on the catalogue, but what good is it to me if I must eat in the kitchen with the coolie help?"

"Eat in the kitchen?"

"Yes, that's it. You see, I've plenty of money," and he drew from the pocket of his white coat a large roll of bills, "but what good is money? The hotel-manager won't let me eat here because I'm always full and like to abuse his guests. Only in the mornings, about this time, does he even let me pass through this way . . . and this is my fourth hotel in Shanghai. They're all the same. You're the first gentleman I have seen and I'd like to talk to you. Clark is my name — William Clark;

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came out here to teach the Chinese boys all about mathematics."

"You are not the William Clark who wrote the work on line-geometry?"

"You know it?" he replied, and his parched face brightened.

I told him that we used it in school and that I had often cursed the very day he was born.

"Curse it—that's right! I do it myself. . . . What good is life? If a man spends ten years on a work, as I did on my 'Mysticism of Numbers,' and only six copies were ever sold—ten years—six copies, and my royalties were six shillings. Ten years! But what's the difference? It was a beautiful subject: full of mystery. Modern mathematics is saturated with mystery. Ever read the works of Cantor, and Weierstrass? Two great mathematical detectives . . . they rid the world of some horrible fallacies. But what thanks do they get? They should have come to China to eat in the kitchen. Ha! Ha!"

He came into my room a few days later and invited me to go with him to the native walled city and see a slice of the unknown. We passed through the French settlement, entered the gate of the city, and rode on and on until the streets became too narrow for the rickshaw and we

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were obliged to continue on foot. Soon we arrived at a small temple and, passing through the yard, reached a low doorway. Dr. Clark struck the door with his stick, which presently was opened by an old man who seemed quite indifferent to our coming. One side of the room that we entered was entirely open, without a wall, only separated from the small garden by a low carved teakwood railing. In the center stood a table with a marble top.

Presently two dark-skinned Chinese priests entered.

"Mango trick—can do?" asked Dr. Clark in pidgin English.

"Can do—can do." And one of them held out his hand, into which my mathematical friend laid a fifty-cent piece.

They brought an empty flower-pot which we both examined before placing on the table, also a box of sandy earth which Clark himself helped pour into the pot. The priest then drew from his belt a tiny seed, so small that it looked very much like the head of a match. This he pressed into the sandy earth. Now a pail of water was brought, and we both had our fingers in it before it was poured into the flower-pot. It darkened the earth and nothing more. But the priest already had his fan in hand and

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started urging a gentle breeze across the surface of the pot. We bent over it and watched closely.

Presently a tiny yellow sprout arose and as it grew higher, it turned green and divided itself into many stems—leaves unfolded themselves and seemed to grow in sudden jerks; buds formed and opened and in a full minute the whole thing was a little miniature tree about a foot and a half in height. But hardly had we time to admire it when the petals dropped and the two green, plum-shaped mangoes sprang out from the stalk and ripened into a liquid orange.

The priest continued fanning. "All lite!" he said. "Can eat."

We plucked the fruit from the plant and tasted one. It was rich, ripe, and juicy. And from that moment on neither of us spoke until we reached the bar of our hotel. We ordered whisky-sodas and just sat and looked at each other. Before us on the table lay the other mango, which we brought with us. It remained full and ripe.

"So that's the mango trick I have heard so much about," I ventured to break the silence.

"Call it a trick if you like," said Dr. Clark, "but it's more than that. It contains the essence of all things. It contains the germ of our

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two worlds, the world of life and death that we know, and the world of the unknown. Ever read the works of the two great English mathematicians—Bertrand Russell and Whitehead? I can't say that they mention this particular problem, but they touch very near to it. Mathematics is not quite as exact a science as our little teachers would have us believe. Its fundamentals are based upon absurdities. Myths! Sometimes by some irony of chance we have reached correct solutions to problems founded upon absurdities—illogically reasoned. It is only by error that any conclusions at all have ever been reached.

"It is only through vision that any progress can be made," he continued, gazing into the distance. "But what are men doing? They come to China for trade, for business, for money, for greater power. And what is power? . . . Power is bad. Has one of them come here to gain that magical strength, that spirit that lies close to the gate of wisdom, found only in China . . . that simple essence of life that grows the mango tree and gives off light? Do they come to China for this? And what do they say when they see it? They call it a trick or a hypnotic vision, and tomorrow they forget it. They forget it because they want to forget

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it. They must forget it or give up their ugly materialism, their quest for sham power; for without the ugly and the sordid they would perish. They call it a trick and at the same time they forget that the same trick lurks after them; follows them to the ends of the earth; tracks them into their very homes. The same trick is the trick of death . . . and that is why I drink; and remain content to eat in the kitchen with the coolie help."

"Do you think life and death the same thing?" I ventured to ask.

"That I don't say; but what I do feel is this . . . that there is a world that we know—it is small and petty; and there is a world that we don't know, a world that is only touched in moments of fancy, in gestures of madness, in flights of vision. Most people are tied to the one; but as for me, I am no longer interested in existing from meal to meal—I am absorbed by the great unknown."

About two weeks later he knocked at my door to return a borrowed book. "Yes, I am leaving, or rather I am asked by the hotel to. . . . I must have raised another scene last night, but it is just as well—I am going to live with the natives. I think I am beginning to understand them and they will understand me.

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. . . As for the white men, I understand them less and less every day, and that is why I abuse them when . . . it is just as well. . . . And when my money runs out, then perhaps I shall know the secret, the great secret of immaterialism—the secret of the great unknown. Good-by.”

II

Six months later, to escape the heat of the city, I took one of the large river steamers up the famous Yangtze-kiang as far as Hankow. This is as far as large steamers go, but it is possible to hire a junk and a crew, as some missionaries must, for further navigation. It is through the waters of the Yangtze-kiang that one may hope to reach the lofty steppes of Tibet. But the journey is slow and expensive. We had to content ourselves with the tales told by those who came from this distant land of mystery. But how many have ever returned at all? At Hankow we saw the old university, the seat of learning of ancient China, and its marvelous library.

"If I ever get the chance," I promised my host, "I am coming back to make extracts and translations, with native help, of several of your Chinese classics which deal with the theory and philosophy of art."

"Art?" he asked in amazement. "Why art?"

"Because I feel that the Chinese have

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touched life's essence deeper and truer in their art . . . at least to Western eyes," I quickly added.

"Do you think that Chinese philosophy could embrace our Western problems?"

"No; but I do think that two thousand years of Chinese culture would not have produced a Europe such as we had in 1914."

In this channel our discussion ran for days, and I am indebted to my host for much valuable information that the many years in China had gained for him.

One morning, as I was looking at a Chinese picture that I had bought, and trying, with the aid of Professor Giles' book, to estimate its age, the servant came into the room and announced:

"China boy stand yard-side. Mango tree can do."

"There you have it," I said to my host. "Explain that if you can."

"Well, let's see what the fakirs can do," he replied.

In the yard we found two poor-looking coolies in rags. One had a swollen knee around which was bound what looked like a silk neck-tie. I looked closer and discovered a label bearing the words: "Liberty, London."

"Where did you get this?" I inquired.

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"Master—he give."

"Where is your master?"

"Master wait street-side. Mango tree can do."

We announced that we were ready to be entertained, and in a minute they returned with their master. Our servant had already placed an old tomato-can and a jug of water on the steps.

The master appeared, no better dressed than his aids, only his hair was lighter, as though it were burnt brown by the sun. He carefully avoided looking at us and immediately began his performance by scraping up the gravel of the path with the tomato-can.

"Just a minute," I interrupted. "Don't you speak English? Are you not Dr. Clark?"

He dropped the can and looked up over his glasses.

"What have you done!" I cried. "You have thrown away your life for a trick."

He shook his head.

"You have become a begging conjurer! You have traded your science for . . ." Words failed me.

He still shook his head.

"You will not understand," he said finally. "Not because you can't understand but because

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you don't want to. And why should I explain? . . . I am not here to explain, I am here to do my little act. If you will pay us we will continue. If not, then well and good. I know very well that you have seen this before, but you have not seen it done as I can do it. I have completed it with an addition that has turned it from a trick into a miracle . . . yes, a miracle. There is a miracle in every man, and every man can in his life perform at least one miracle . . . but few do, that is their tragedy. . . . Shall I continue?"

He performed the act with marvelous skill but in the same manner in which I had seen it done before, only instead of fanning the surface of the pot he blew across it with his warm breath. One large mango ripened before my eyes.

"Now," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "now pluck it, and eat it if you can!"

I took the mango from the tree but before I had time to bring it to my mouth I felt a strange, creeping movement in my hand. The mango was already rotten! I let the putrid thing fall to the ground; my fingers were stained with its rot.

"That's my addition," the master exclaimed. "The addition of death. When man plucks the

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fruit of life, it rots in his hand. The forces of nature are greater than the powers of man. The proud orders of death are stronger than the fickleness of life. Time in man is petty to the time of the eternal, but the space of man . . . what is space? His space is only his capacity. Have you a capacity for the meager or for the eternal? Do you acquire things that are everlasting or do you scratch from the world's slimy surface a few petty odds and ends which you call property? Will you carry an ounce of it with you beyond your grave?"

Had I not known him so well I might have been offended at his schoolroom voice. But I quickly replied, "You still demand to be paid for your services."

"Well, yes," he admitted. "But that is because I cannot yet do without food. Some day I may be able to cast it away as I have thrown worldly goods into the rubbish-heap where they belong. . . . We are on our way to Tibet. My two boys are natives of Tibet and are as anxious to return as I am to get there. Only the other day we met four more who were going the same way and we have already, with the help of the Buddhist priests, secured our boat. We are now stocking it with provisions for the jour-

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ney and, anxious to do my share, I am showing one of the feats. But it is only a means to an end."

"Could you teach us the mango trick?" inquired my host.

He shook his head sadly.

"One hundred dollars," pressed my business friend, "if you show us your secret."

"There is no secret that can be passed from one man to another. It can only be acquired through suffering and pain. Wisdom cannot be sold or bought. It is a merchandise that has no traffic.

"In the past six months," continued the master of the mango, "I have learned more than during all my previous years. I think I have reached the first step to wisdom. But I am still an infant compared to the sages of Tibet who are able to raise themselves bodily from the ground. . . . I am still an infant but I am absorbed by the mystery of existence and the first step I have already reached. We have no secrets. . . . We are not fakirs. . . . I will gladly tell anyone the philosophy that grows and rots a mango. It is so simple and yet difficult to accomplish. It can be summed up in a few words—the words of the ancient Chinese:

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—‘Lambs have the grace to suckle kneeling.’ ”

His manner was filled with contempt. He turned for the gate and as he passed through repeated the words, as though talking to himself—“Lambs have the grace to. . . .”

THE
LITTLE MASTER OF THE SKY

THE LITTLE MASTER OF THE SKY

I

EVEN idiots it seems have their place and purpose in society or as a chess-player would say tapping his fingers on the board—"That pawn may cost you your queen." The little village of M—— realized this only after it was too late.

The police of M—— all knew that Peter, a half-wit, or "Silly Peter" as he was called, was perfectly harmless; even though at times he would litter the streets and market-place with bread-crumbs. But the pigeons of M—— soon cleared the walks.

Peter, it seems, had at an early age dedicated his silly life to the pigeons. All his cares and sorrows were bound up in the lives of the birds. In fact it seemed as though he himself became bird-like. He could flap his arms to his sides and produce that same dull, penetrating note that was given only to this particular species of bird when they flapped their wings.

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At an early age he was left without parents and managed to grow up among the horses and cows in the barns. But these larger animals were entirely out of his sphere—he did not understand them.

One day when the lad was about seven years old, the village folk suddenly noticed that he was lame. When asked about it, all he would reply was: "The pigeons made me lame."

Luba, a farmer's fat cook, once told at the market-place how Peter became lame. She told of how the boy stood on the roof of her master's barn flapping his arms in imitation of the birds encircling his head; how he sprang in the air in a mad attempt to fly, and fell to the ground. But Luba had a reputation for being a liar, and none believed her although all enjoyed listening. "Such good imagination," they would say, after she was gone.

Peter grew up a little lame, but this defect seemed only to add to his nimbleness. He could climb a telegraph-pole sideways like a parrot walking up a stick. Once on top he would swing his good leg around the cross-beam and wave his hat—and from below a flight of flapping and fluttering birds would arise.

In this way he lived and grew to the age of sixteen, although his small, protruding bones

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and round, childlike eyes kept him looking younger. Where he slept and where he ate, all remained a mystery to the village folk; but this mystery was not near as great as another. . . .

The schoolmaster once noticed that at times the pigeons seemed all gray, and at other times the greater number of them carried large pink breasts; also at times there were few, while on other days the streets and market-place were thickly dotted with nodding, pecking birds; also that never could they find the very young ones.

It seemed as though only Peter knew the secret—but when asked about it he would show a silly grin and shy away, pretending to be much occupied chasing the birds that ever flocked about him.

He would travel about from barn to barn collecting the feed that fell from the bins of careless animals. He would sometimes travel along the back yards, twist his mouth and call to nobody in particular: "A few crumbs for the birdies, lady?" And presently through an open window a crust would fly, and with this buried in his hat he would be off.

Only among the poor would he hobble about. He never ventured up the hill where the better people lived; and it is perhaps for this reason that he was seldom disturbed.

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To himself Silly Peter was monarch of the air. In his own distorted mind he was master of all creatures that flew. Worldly cares he left to those who had inherited worldly material; as for himself, he was concerned only with the aerial strata and with the feathery creatures thereof. Nobody wanted those; so he acquired them as he acquired the cast-off hat that he wore. He fathomed the airy dome, tasted it, drank it, navigated his creatures through it, and even fanned life into it by flapping his bony arms.

He understood the air and the sky, and it all belonged to him. Every atom of sky that poured itself over the village of M—— belonged to Silly Peter. It seemed as though he purposely limped lightly over the ground that was foreign to his nature; for he was captain and master of the sky,

II

"We must first loosen the ground," said a petty officer. "If the soil is too hard, then the action will drag. And quick action and a brisk finish always make for a better picture."

"Hey, you!" commanded the Captain. "Go get another shovel and help dig."

While two soldiers stood digging in a rectangular plot in the market-place, the camera-men had set up and were adjusting a motion-picture apparatus. Twenty-five feet away stood six soldiers leaning on their rifles, talking and laughing.

"Enough digging!" shouted the Captain. "Turn the loose earth back into the pit." The soldiers obeyed.

"Are you ready?" he said, as he turned to the camera-men.

"All ready," came the reply.

"Now," said the Captain, winking maliciously to two of his men, "you run around and pick me up a beggar."

The soldiers started off, pushing their way

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through the sheepish crowd and into a side-street. After walking a few hundred paces one remarked to the other: "When you don't need them, a hundred are upon you. When you want them—the devil take it."

At last they came upon Silly Peter and decided that he would answer.

"Come along, boy; the Captain wants you," they said, taking hold of his arms.

"Let me go!" The boy struggled. "I did nothing."

"Come along, you fool!"

They brought Silly Peter to the square, placed him on the spot that smelled fresh with upturned earth, placed a shovel in his hands and told him to dig his grave.

When they stepped aside, the terrified boy could see the camera before him and the six soldiers standing at attention a few paces away. Already the clicking handles started turning.

"Dig!" shouted the Captain.

"I don't want a grave," whimpered the frightened creature as several pigeons approached. "I don't want a grave," as he turned up the loose earth with trembling shovel-strokes. "I don't want a grave," and tears ran in trickling rivulets down his silly face.

Even an idiot could understand. At one side

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of him he was confronted with death for no apparent reason at all. And on the other side of him flew his pigeons.

Suddenly the signal was given; the six rifles were raised, and a volley of blank cartridges shot at the boy. The frightened birds flew into the air as the twisted frame of Silly Peter sank into the soft, upturned earth.

When the smoke had cleared, a soldier came up and shouted: "Hey fool! Get up!—You're not dead." But the boy only sobbed, with his face beside the shovel in the fresh earth.

The soldiers were dismissed, and the Captain climbed into his carriage and drove away. The sheep-like inhabitants of the village of M——feared to venture near the spot of military maneuver.

Presently an old farmer, driving his horse across the square, stopped, lifted the boy, and said: "Don't cry, Peter. It is only a little joke. See, you're not dead—here, pick up your hat. See all the pigeons are around us—you're not dead."

The boy seemed numb and twisted like the limb of a tree as the old man, following his horse, helped him across the market-place and through the lane.

"Don't be foolish, Peter. You're not dead.

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See the pigeons; see the sky. Look, here is Luba—she will bring us soup.”

But the boy squinted at the sun through a film of tears and with his one-sided mouth mumbled: “I don’t want a grave.”

III

The Captain lit a cigarette as he leaned back in the carriage. The horses snorted as they drew up the hill. "Why," he asked himself, "are people afraid of dying? For many, life can hold little attraction, yet even an imbecile fears death as though it were the devil himself. Yet each man nurses his own pet fears."

The carriage rocked from side to side as it climbed the hill, and the Captain turned his mind to his young wife. "It's all imagination; that's what I think," he said to himself. "It's all in her mind. Now she's afraid of this and afraid of that, and in this way she worries herself ill.

"And the doctor thinks he knows it all, but he knows nothing. He should have given her iron, she's too pale. Now we shall have to call him again. It is all a trick that doctors have. Yes, each man looks out for himself. But I will call him again and say to him: 'Don't you think a little iron would be good for her, she is so pale?' And he will reply: 'Yes, it can't harm.'

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But I would have to say this to the doctor when he is putting on his coat in the hallway so that Vera does not hear.

"No. Vera must not hear that I think her pale. It would worry her and she might become worse. Then she would have to go to bed again, the doctor would come again, and the servants would do as they pleased. And Vera would grow worse and more nervous and——"

"Here we are!" called the coachman and the Captain stepped out upon his own lawn.

The house was built of stone, and although its architecture was plain, it had the solidity of a castle. Even the vines that grew up the lattice-work and walls seemed to intertwine their curly branches into a living network that helped fortify the stone nest of the Captain and his beautiful Vera.

The lovely creature was passing her hands lightly over the keyboard of the piano as the Captain entered.

"It is only I," he called; but she was startled nevertheless.

"I am glad you came," she said as she rose to meet him, and placing her pale head on his decorated breast, added—"I am afraid to remain here alone."

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"But where are the servants, my dear?"

"Oh, servants don't count."

"Well, well, my darling," spoke the Captain, petting her. "You have nothing to fear. It is all imagination."

"But I am so nervous."

"Come, my dear. Let's have tea and I will tell you a funny story."

Presently they were seated at the table drinking tea, and the Captain began his story.

"You know, my dear," he said, "we are going to put an end to all this foolish political talk and people's committees. Any beggar forms a committee, and they do what they like. Civil authorities and military authorities are all alike to them."

"Oh, I am so afraid of beggars," interrupted the beautiful Vera.

"Well, my dear, soon there will be nothing to be afraid of; a propaganda council was organized at headquarters this morning, and what do you think? This morning two men arrived with a moving-picture camera to take pictures of our orderly town, and in the afternoon we took an object-lesson picture. I marched the soldiers into the square and we dug up a plot so that the earth might be soft.

"Then we had a beggar dig his own grave as

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we took the picture. When he had dug enough, I gave the signal and the firing-squad drew up their rifles and blazed away."

"Why did you kill him?"

"No, my dear, we only pretended to kill him. I myself was careful to see that the leads were taken off the cartridges. But you see we could not tell the beggar that he was not going to die because we wanted to make the picture look realistic—he might have run away in the middle and ruined the film.

"Well, my dear, to make a long story short, the fool beggar fell into the pit, believing himself really killed. It will make a fine picture. It will be shown in all the surrounding towns as an object-lesson and before the picture itself appears on the screen it will be entitled—I suggested it myself—it will read—'This is what happened to a fool who thought he could oppose the military authorities,' and then will be shown the picture of the beggar digging his own grave.

"It will be a great lesson and education to the people whose heads have been turned. It will be sent all over the country and if the results are favorable and it pleases headquarters who can say"—at this point he clasped his wife's pale hand—"who can say that I will not receive another decoration, or perhaps a promotion?

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Who can tell, my dear? Things move so quickly these days."

In the evening as they were eating, Vera looked up from her plate and spoke: "You know, if it happened to me, I think I should die."

"Don't talk nonsense," replied the Captain, angered by the idea. "How could it happen to you?"

"Well, supposing the revolutionists took control and then——"

"Supposing! Supposing the sky should fall," he interrupted, and smiled on his lovely and delicate Vera.

IV

Silly Peter refused to eat the bowl of soup that Luba placed out for him, but he went aloft in the barn and cried in his dull, monotonous tone: "I don't want a grave—I don't want a grave," until he fell asleep.

Then over his simple, slumbering brain came a vision.

He saw himself standing on an elevated place and over him rested the great ultramarine dome of sky. About him he could see the horizon as though it were a white circle of foam.

Gradually this circle grew smaller and smaller and rose up like a sparkling and living halo. As it came nearer, he discovered that the circle was composed of hundreds of white doves.

Soon they were close over him encircling the elevation on which he stood, and he could hear the wild beating of the wings as though they were rolling a tattoo on muffled drums. Then suddenly the circle broke, and rose like a puff of smoke against a sky of blue.

With startling rapidity it rose until it rent

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and perforated the sky, and was lost from sight. Only a large oval opening of light-gray nothingness remained overhead—a hole in the sky—an opening to heaven.

Then from all quarters came a loud uproar; a thousand piercing whistling yells; a rackety, rumbling, rattling commotion mixed with the beat and swish of wings. This was followed by an upward rush which darkened the sky.

Peter saw himself standing like a monarch reviewing his nation from an elevated platform. Around him flew the feathered tribes of the air. From the fluttering starling to the giant albatross, all were liberated and each paid homage to him—the master of the sky—before they shot upward, in a long smoke-like spiral, and through the oval opening in the rent heaven.

Finally they were all gone and he saw himself take a last look about him as he stood alone on his elevation. He then craned his neck and turned his face to the oval nothingness—flapped his arms, and with a thrilling sensation flew heavenward. His body went through the air a little sideways—but it flew, and the rest did not matter.

Poor Peter awoke to find himself in the loft of the barn among his cages of pigeons, confronted with the sordidness of material reality.

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He opened a small window and then flung open the cages.

Through the night he limped from barn to barn, darting under wagons, and between the legs of slumbering horses, opening doors, boxes, and even barrels. He was liberating the imprisoned, full-breasted creatures.

The little village of M—— slept soundly as it was being flooded with fluttering birds. Only the hypersensitive Vera was disturbed by the monotonous beating of restless wings.

V

No longer was there any mystery regarding the pigeons. In the morning the streets were covered with pink-breasted birds as well as gray. Besides this, there were breeds and species of pigeons that the villagers of M—— had never seen before. Wherever one turned, one saw pigeons. They were on the ground and in the sky, as well as upon the roofs. Their colors were mixed, and their leaders were lost.

Silly Peter ran joyfully about the streets waving a little white flag at the disorganized flying tribes, waving a white flag as though it were a truce to the sky.

For some reason or other, an extra large number of birds took refuge on the gable and chimney of the Captain's stone house on the hill.

Late in the afternoon, as the charming Vera was playing at the piano, a dark shadow crept over her page of music, and this was accompanied by a scrambling noise from outside. As she turned about, she could see through the

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corner of her eye a struggling figure across the window, clambering on the vines. The body was silhouetted against the sky.

One glance was sufficient—her throat let loose a piercing scream as she ran from the room into the kitchen. “A man! A man is climbing up the house—quick, send for the police!” she shouted breathlessly to the servants.

Holding her throbbing temples with both hands, she waited with the servants in the kitchen. Soon two policemen arrived, having been told that a robber had entered the house, but they found nothing excepting Silly Peter on the top of the roof, propped against the chimney, waving his flag and signaling to his birds.

“He’s harmless,” said the officer. “I can’t make him come down, madam. I’m a policeman, not a fireman.” And with this they went away, leaving Vera with her servants and Peter with his pigeons.

Presently the Captain came home, raved and shouted as he swung his arms—but Peter sat with his back against the chimney, making bubbles with his mouth and holding two new-born birds close to his face in order that they might

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prick the bubbles with their little soft beaks and drink.

"Come down from my house, you beggar!" But this did not even frighten the birds that flocked about Silly Peter in ever-increasing numbers.

At length he came into the house, and took a rifle from his case. "Just wait till it grows dark," he mumbled. But the lovely Vera jumped from her chair and, with tears in her eyes, cried: "No! No! God will see you. He will never forgive us. After all, what harm does the boy do? He did not intend to frighten me, I am sure. Put it away, my dear—God will never forgive us if you don't."

Who could resist a pleading tear from lovely Vera? Surely not the Captain.

"You are right, my dear. He can do us no harm," he finally allowed.

At night there was a noise and commotion on the roof. Vera awoke, but then all was silent again. A fearful silence hung over the house, interrupted only by the heavy breathing of her devoted soldier husband.

She remained awake until morning and was glad when she heard the servants stir. Then thinking that a little music might be restful, she dressed herself lightly and went down to the

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drawing-room, opened the piano, and finally opened the shutter. There beneath her on the ground lay Peter, with his face up—dead. His round childlike eyes stared heavenward as his birds sat about in mournful groups of twos and fours.

The unfortunate Vera again rushed into the kitchen and sent for the police, before she ran, terrified by the sight she had just beheld, to awaken her husband. In about an hour, although it seemed longer, the poor folk of the village arrived and carried the body from the yard. Fat Luba insisted upon halting the procession long enough so that she could kiss the white forehead of the little dead master of the sky. A ring of pigeons swirled around the procession as it marched down the hill.

VI

Vera nursed up a little fever for herself and was put to bed, while Luba, the cook, stood in the market-place and with tears in her eyes told everybody that the Captain killed her little Major of the Birds—"and now nobody will look after them, and they will make dirt everywhere. And people will have to move away. And he is such a bad man to take the crumbs away from little doves. And if he has any children, I wish them the best of everything for they surely will be unfortunate."

Marking the spot where Peter fell were two new-born birds crushed beside the stone house on the hill. Through the air swung a grand flight describing an oval in the sky. At each end of the oval the pigeons beat their wings as they rounded the curve. With mournful thuds they beat, as they circled over the old farmer's house and again over the solid stone house on the hill.

All day they flapped a tattoo with their wings and beat their sorrowful dead sounds into lovely

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Vera's ears. In the evening the Captain sent for the doctor.

All night long the uncontrollable feathery tribes encircled the town with their monotonous beating and swishing of wings.

The next day Vera grew worse, as Luba in the market-place kept insisting that the Captain killed her Little Master of the Birds; until a committee of three workingmen took it upon themselves to investigate. They started for the hill, but stopped off in order to induce the schoolmaster to join them.

The schoolmaster, however, did not allow himself to be disturbed. He was playing chess with a friend, and kept tapping the dull-sounding table with his fingers, and repeating in a monotone: "If he disturbs that pawn, he may lose his queen."

As the committee went on to the hill, they were overtaken by the doctor in his carriage. At last they arrived at the stone house and found the doctor walking briskly up and down the drawing-room smoking a cigarette—he had not yet told the Captain.

Upstairs they could hear the Captain in Vera's darkened room, kneel down beside the bed.

"Do you know, my darling," he spoke, "I

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have never kept anything from you—but the other day when I told you about the beggar, I should have told you that he was— Are you listening, my dear? I should have told you that he was the same boy—the poor boy that lived with the pigeons.

“See; we have already been—are you listening, my dear? God has already punished us—now you can get better and we will go away from here. We will go to some quiet place—Are you listening, my dear? We will go to some—do you hear me, Vera? My darling girl, don’t sleep now. Tell me, what did the doctor say? Wake up, Vera.”—But the hand of Death had already passed over Vera.

The Little Master of the Sky didn’t need a grave and didn’t want one. But they dug one for him just the same, at the end of the town. While his pigeons encircled the sky and swished the air, the villagers straightened his twisted little body and slipped it into a narrow box, and lowered him down. The poor folk gave him a little grave, but he doesn’t need it and he never uses it.

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BURNING BEARD

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THE anchor was lifted and as it rose above the water's surface huge flakes of Shanghai mud thumped back into the coffee-colored river. Again the game was resumed in the smoker. Kalt, the German sea-captain, who was returning from a three-year internment in Java, hesitated before the window. The low, rolling banks of the Shanghai River widened as the vibration of the steamer increased and the salt air of that churning bit of water that is neither the Yellow nor the Eastern Sea, seeped through the cracks and loose rubber weather-stripping of the doors and windows. Again the colored chips were carefully measured out upon the green table—but still Kalt hesitated.

From Java to Singapore he had lost two thousand Dutch dollars. From Singapore to Hongkong he had lost over three thousand, and from Hongkong to Shanghai another two thousand. He had now reached the limit of his resources and if he continued to lose he would

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have to forego his intended stay in America and return direct to his native land. This was not a pleasant thought. But then, if he played he might gain back and even . . . in warm countries luck turns as quickly as milk. At last he decided. "Why should I play like an ordinary gambler? Have I no other amusement in life?" He started for the door and was about to leave when his ears caught the soft clicking sound of the chips and the fresh snap of new cards. . . . He lit a cigar and took his place at the table.

It was two days from Shanghai to Nagasaki, Japan, where the steamer took its coal, handed up basket by basket, passing through busy little hands all night long. During these two days Kalt again lost, and again he lost on the way to Yokohama.

Once more the nose of the boat turned seaward, this time for the final leap—the twenty-odd days' drive across the restless Pacific.

Kalt kept to his cabin.

Above him on the deck he could hear the Captain walk in solemn inspection and give orders to the first mate. Above him, also, he knew that the chips were already being counted out in stacks upon the green cloth.

To play or not to play? The thought burned

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in his brain. To win! America, the promised land where money buys everything. But to lose once more would be to lose all. For he realized that nowhere can the lack of money be felt more than in America. To play or not to play?

"Am I a common gambler?" he asked himself. "Must I toss my last in a game of chance and in the end throw myself over like a useless log, spent and wasted by too much grinding and too little care?—The strong man wins, but the superman plays not at all."

Three times his hand grasped the knob of the door and three times he released his hold. At length he flung himself on the bed and gazed blankly at the ceiling where the very boards seemed to move back and forth, intermeshing like the cards in the game.

Then he heard his door open and something creep into the room. He sat up and there on the floor knelt a little hunchback with a bright red beard. "Help me! Help me!" he pleaded. Kalt jumped from the bed.

"Help me! Help me! I'm so hungry," cried the little man on the floor. But Kalt was no longer listening; he had opened the lid of his case and was taking out the remainder of his money. "Lucky," he kept mumbling to him-

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self. "What is more lucky than a hunch-back?" He fixed his hair with one pass of the comb, took the key from the door and was about to leave when he turned back.

"Here, you lucky little devil!" he said. "Let me rub this money on your hump. It will bring me luck—and God help you if it don't!"

"Help me, I am hungry!" but Kalt only rubbed more briskly, stepped into the hallway, locking the little creature in his room, and darted up the stairs to the smoker. The game had just begun. The little man in the cabin ate the fruit that was about to turn bad, devoured the stale candies, munched on a bag of crystallized plums, ate the skins of two bananas, and found half a box of biscuits and a large cake of Swiss chocolate. Then he felt better, for he stood on a chair to view himself in the glass, and discovered a small flask of brandy. He drank a little, rubbed his belly, and then commenced to wash the coal from his hands and face. He shampooed his head and beard and lit one of Kalt's cigars and settled himself on the couch to the painful duty of combing clean his matted beard which soon glistened between the black teeth of the comb like a juicy flame.

Shortly after midnight Kalt returned the vic-

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tor. He rubbed his winnings on the little man's hump and suddenly turned him around and said: "Where do you come from?"

"Who, I? Why, I come from nowhere . . . I mean all over. From the home of the French Consulate in Turon. I was also for a while in the Palace at Saigon . . . I was all over. At Paris I was at Versailles. . . . But just now I come from nowhere. . . . Nowhere at all."

"You must be a jester, a court jester."

"Who, I? . . . I am the most serious man in the world. Nobody is so unfortunate."

"Unfortunate? Why, you are the only bit of luck I've had in weeks. You lucky little jester, you must stay with me always."

"Who, I? I tell you I am not a joker. I am serious. . . . I am the most unlucky person in the world, and even in China. I am serious."

"But you said you were at Versailles. . . ."

"I was all over. I even worked on top of the Eiffel Tower, but I tell you I am not a joker. I am serious. I am——"

"Who are you!"

"Who, I? I am Abe, the painter. . . . I can also calcimine and gild."

"What? A house-painter!"

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"First-class . . . the best."

"But what are you doing here?"

"I told you—I am unlucky. The most unlucky in the world. . . . You can't imagine how misfortune can pile itself on one person. I am like a paint that never dries. Wherever I go the same thing. First my mother, she crippled me so I wouldn't have to serve in the military. Then we had a little massacre and I had to leave Poland. In Germany I had a bad time so I went to France. But there everything goes by seasons. . . . I am handy on the ladder, I am handy on the scaffold, I have long hands and for ceiling-work I don't have to bend . . . but everything goes by seasons. When there was no work it was bad. . . . Do you know what bad is? Bad is bad, and worse it can't be. Well, then I saw a sign that said 'French China—French China is a rich country. Unlimited opportunities. A young America. Be a settler. Why not? The Government pays transportation.' Well, what should I know? Did I know what it was till I got there? Could I paint the coolies' houses when they don't use paint?"

"They have no houses?"

"Poor! You should see how people can live! And I, can I compete with coolie labor?"

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I went straight to the Governor, and at once he gave me a job to paint his house. But when it was finished—what then? Then he told me: ‘Abe, you want to make money—buy up some land and plant rubber.’ Then I had to tell him the truth, and I told it to him plain. . . . He turned pale.”

“What did you tell him?” inquired Kalt.

“I told him that I had no money. ‘No money!’ he cried. ‘Not a cent!’ Then he gave me a lecture and said I had no right to go to a new country without money . . . and take free transportation and fool the Government.

“Well, I left that unlimited land and came straight to Shanghai, but there, too, it is bad without money. So many foreigners, and only the Chinese work. ‘How do you earn your money?’ I asked one fellow. ‘Easiest thing in the world,’ he said. ‘You play roulette. Come along, I’ll show you.’ He took me to the place and in one night before my very eyes he made four hundred dollars—it made me dizzy. So I tried it myself, but I am too unlucky. In one hour I lost my five dollars . . . always unlucky. Well, there was nothing to do, so I decided to go to America. I waited for a boat and when it docked I packed myself away in

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the cellar with the coal. But soon my food ran out and I became so hungry that I could not stand it any longer. What can the captain do to me? He will make me work."

"No! no!" interrupted Kalt. "I won't let you go. You are my luck. You must stay here."

"But I am hungry."

"Never mind. You will eat the best of everything. Leave it to me. The steward is a countryman of mine. Leave it to me."

In the morning Kalt arranged to have double-portion meals sent to his stateroom and from that day on he kept his prisoner under lock and key. Before the trip was over he had not only won back what he had lost but was a gainer by thirty thousand dollars.

Now, however, arose the question as to how he was to get Abe past the immigration authorities at San Francisco.

When the time came and most of the passengers had already left the steamer and were occupied with the customs officers on the pier, Kalt opened the door of his stateroom and led Abe out of the room on a long leather leash. Abe was dressed in a green Chinese mandarin-coat that reached to the floor. In his hand he carried a large lady's fan and his red beard

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stood out against the green coat and seemed to sparkle with light.

"This is my jester," Kalt explained, presenting his passport.

"What is he?" asked one of the officers.

"A jester!"

"I am not a joker," protested Abe from under his silken gown. "I am the most serious——"

"Keep still."

"It says nothing about your servant in the passport."

"He is not a servant. He is my jester. Can't you see how little he is?"

"But we don't allow slaves in America."

"He is not a slave. I only have him tied so I don't lose him. . . . He is so little."

"But what nationality is he?"

"Why—he—he has no nationality. He is just a plain jester. No jesters have nationalities."

"What good is he—what do you do with him?"

"Why, he is no good, he is only lucky to have with you."

"Oh, I see—like a rabbit's foot."

"Yes, all jesters are lucky. Didn't you ever have one come through here before?"

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"No."

"Didn't you ever see one before?"

"Not a real one—but I heard of them and I saw one once on the stage."

"That's it!" replied Kalt with greater assurance. That's what they are used for. Besides, no jesters need passports. They're lucky for the country. There are no regulations prohibiting jesters anywhere. . . . I am surprised you never had one before."

The immigration officer turned to his companion. "Well, what do you say?"

"I don't have any regulations against these kind of people. It's not like coolies or Russians. Besides, he is so small he couldn't count for a real person."

"All right. Passed! Who's next?"

In this way Abe came to America. They lived for about a month in a large hotel in New York when suddenly one day Abe said: "Captain Kalt, I must tell you a secret. Do you know what makes my beard so red? . . . I am poisoned! Plain poisoned. No, I didn't eat anything bad. . . . I am poisoned with lead. Twenty years a painter, and my skin don't sweat. That's why my beard is so red. . . . All my soul comes out in one place. It breaks out like fire. Nobody knows what is

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inside of me. I burn inside like wet lime. Such an unlucky person you never saw. . . . That is why I can't stay with you any longer. I must paint. I don't like to be a joker. A joker is not a serious person. If you only knew what is inside of me . . . that is why my beard is so red."

Now Captain Kalt has gone into the importing business and Abe has joined the painters' union. Last week he was to do our bathroom, but he never showed up till this morning.

"How can I help it?" he said. "I am so unlucky—on my last job the paint didn't dry."

THE
DARK CLOAK

THE DARK CLOAK

LOSOFF, the powerful blacksmith, had led a simple and quiet life until one early morning for no apparent reason at all he strangled his wife, ran to the police and cried: "Arrest me, I killed her!"

He gave no reason for his act and nothing could persuade him to talk. He treated the police and jail officials with extreme contempt and asked for an early trial. In fact he demanded it. He was impatient and he rattled the door of his cell until he had loosened the hinges and lock.

He was brought to the court-room with his hands chained. Twice he rose to disturb the court by asking that he be sentenced at once. But legal custom demanded a regular routine. Again he rose and slowly twisting his hands snapped the chain, after which he seemed to feel relieved and settled down to munching a crust of bread that he took from his shoe. The soldiers stood on guard. For a moment the court

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was aghast, then it hurried on with the proceedings.

"Life has played me a trick and I want to die," he said, after being asked to rise. The judge pronounced sentence and swept out of the room.

The cell was doubly bolted, but the prisoner continued to rattle the door and call for the ropes. He threw his iron dishes into the corridor and did his best to terrorize the officials.

At about this time a plot had been discovered against the life of the Czar and a young revolutionist arrested. He was searched, questioned, examined and put through an ordeal but would disclose nothing. Then in order to loosen his tongue and weaken his spirit he was locked in the same cell with the blacksmith Losoff.

At first the murderer regarded the invader with a good deal of suspicion, and snapping the ear off a clay water-jug, scratched a line across the stone floor of the cell and asked, in language very plain, that the young man keep to his own side. They did not speak for two days. On the evening of the third Losoff got down on his knees and with his sleeve rubbed out the line. Before a week had passed they were comrades—brothers.

The young man was bony and pale and Lo-

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soff nicknamed him "Ghost." They spoke about religion and faith and the possibility of there being a world beyond.

About a week before the date set for the execution and after telling the red-faced priest that he would strangle him if he dared enter the cell, Losoff called his cell-mate over to the little bench along the wall.

"Tell me, Ghost," he said, "do you think that when a man dies—is that the end?"

"It all depends. Sometimes it is, and sometimes not."

"On what does it depend?"

"It depends on the man himself, I think."

"But when I am dead—will that be the end?"

"It depends on how you lived, what memories you leave behind . . . what deeds you have accomplished . . . it all depends."

"Do only good deeds live on?"

"Yes."

"Tell the truth, Ghost, we have no reason to lie to each other, have we? Tell the truth, do you think I will see my friends after I am dead?"

"I don't know."

"Is it because you don't believe in Heaven or Hell?"

"No, not that."

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"Then why, Ghost—tell me why you don't think I will?"

"Because . . ."

"Because why?"

"Because you have lived wrongly."

"Then you think I can't die right because I have lived wrong?"

"Yes."

"You mean because I killed her?"

"Yes."

"But why did I kill her?"

"How should I know?"

"Do you think I am sorry, Ghost?"

"Perhaps not."

"Well, I'll tell you then—I am not sorry."

Losoff remained silent the rest of that day, he seemed brooding and hurt. He went to bed at night but could not sleep;—his arm reached out unconsciously and twitched. At length unable to resist he sat up and said—"Listen, Ghost, I want to tell you something. Time passes quickly and any day you may be taken from me."

The young man rubbed his eyes.

"I have been thinking of what you said and I want you to know something. If you ever meet the man with the dark cloak I want you to be careful. Besides, I promised to tell you

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something a long time ago. It's about the professor—he wasn't really a professor but he would have been one, I am sure. I don't know how to begin but it all happened in the old days when I was strong—not a man in Moscow was stronger than I—I could lift a wagon on my back and carry it into the shop. I could hammer out a set of horseshoes as quickly as you could trim the hoofs and nail them on. But what's the use of talking about that. . . . I was strong." The young man finished rubbing his eyes and sat up. Losoff continued:

"Soon I had too much work and I took in a helper—a good man who had just buried his wife and was left with a little five-year-old boy. A bright little fellow, I can see him now with his curly head playing with the nails, or pulling on the straps of my leather apron while I blew the bellows. In less than two years his father caught typhus, turned blue and died. I closed the shop for the funeral and took the little man home to my lodging. One day, after playing in the street, he came into the shop and said—'Uncle, I want to go to school like the other boys'—and I said to him—'What do you need it for?'—but he was bright and as sharp as steel and quick like an arrow, 'I want to be a professor,' he said. I dropped the hammer and

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lifted him in my arms and kissed him and told him he could be just what he liked to be.—‘Get your old horse out of here’—I cried to a coachman—‘I am going out to buy my boy a new suit.’ . . . ‘And, Uncle, don’t forget the cap—with a leather peak, like all the boys have—I’ll show you.’

“The next morning I brought him to school. I told the head master—‘As you can see I am a plain man and I don’t understand fancy language but I want the best there is for my boy and what he needs, I’ll pay for it, but no beating—you understand or you will pay for it.’

“After several years my landlady suddenly commenced saying foolish things to me like only a woman can, and as I was no beauty myself it became a match. She even induced me to be married in church. Well, I let her have her way for what did it matter to me. Little things never matter.

“Soon after I married I noticed that my little professor came to the shop after school to read his books. ‘Why don’t you go home, professor? Everything is so dirty here and it’s dark to read.’—‘I like to be with you, Uncle,’ he said. Well, how could I refuse him? I made him a table and hung up a carriage-lantern and I watched him sit and read every afternoon.

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Sometimes he would tell me about foreign countries and how American Indians were different from Indians of Asia. We were very happy and one day I remember asking him—‘Why is it, little professor, you don’t like to stay at home when I am not there? Does not Auntie treat you well?’—He looked up and said quickly—‘Oh, no, Uncle—she gives me everything’—but there was something holding him back and his eyes seemed ready for tears. You see how a child sometimes knows more than older people?

“One day after my professor was already in high school I said to him—‘Why is it I never know how much money I have in my pocket? I take in a good deal but it melts away I don’t know where.’—‘That is because you don’t keep a reckoning, Uncle. If you tell me every day what you take in and give out I will write it in a book, then I can figure out for you and tell you what you should have left.’ It was a good plan and we started to keep a book. One day I said to him—‘Now tell me, professor, how much money have I in my pocket?’ He opened the book and figured out over forty rubles, but when I counted my money I found only twenty-six. ‘Have you figured correctly?’ I asked.—‘Yes, Uncle,’ he replied again, looking

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over the pages of the book.—‘But how is money missing?’—‘I don’t know, Uncle.—Maybe Auntie helps herself at night.’—‘No, no, you foolish boy, it can’t be. You must have made a mistake. We will try again.’—One night I discovered the boy was right. The woman—and I always gave her plenty besides that which she collected from the lodgers—the woman was helping herself at night. Then it all came out that she thought that I gave the boy more than I gave her and that to her eyes he was good for nothing, and that I loved him instead of loving her. What things a woman can invent?’

“Soon after this happened a strange man came to stay with us. Now listen carefully to what I say. He was like a funeral. Tall, dark, always wore a large black hat and a bright necktie. Listen carefully to what I tell you. Tall, dark-black mustache, and a square black beard, a little grayed at the sides. He wore a black cape and a neat German suit. He was about forty-five years old and spoke every language in Europe. Picture him in your eye and don’t forget him. He came like a funeral and left death behind him. He rented a room, had plenty of money, always paid in advance and sometimes was away for months at a time, but

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always sending his rent-money. Once he came to the shop and asked a lot of questions about my customers and I turned him out . . . I did not understand the manners of these educated gentlemen. One evening I found him alone in his room so I thought I might ask him a question or two.—‘You seem a well-off man,’ I said to him, ‘why do you choose to live here with poor folks such as ourselves?’ ‘Ah, my good man,’ he said with a smile, ‘where then should I live? You see I am working for the people, I have written forbidden booklets, you understand what that means?’—‘But,’ I said, ‘you will bring trouble upon us.’—‘Fear not, my good blacksmith,’ he assured me, ‘I am clever and no trouble will ever follow me here.’

“Once I said to my woman, ‘The dark man will bring us sorrow yet, let’s ask him to leave.’—‘What,’ she cried, ‘you want to take the bread out of my mouth?’ Well . . . and that’s the way we left it, for who can argue with a woman?

“Soon I noticed that she seemed more friendly to the dark man, she bought herself furs and every now and again I would discover something new about the house. First a shawl, then pieces of silk, then a new red table-cloth and when I would ask her about them she would

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laugh and say, 'Where are your eyes, you fool . . . why, that's been here for ages.' At the same time my little professor grew to be a sturdy fellow. He worked with me in the shop in vacation time, but I made him wear heavy leather gloves to save his hands. He did very well in school and was preparing himself for college . . . how I loved him!

"But the woman grew bitter and jealous and the years had only soured her. First she hated him because I gave him what he needed but now she would have poisoned him if she only dared—only because I loved him. She would have hated anything that I loved. I warned him to be careful not to offend her and told him that when he goes to college the next year he would live away from the city and I would visit him.—'You won't be ashamed of your simple Uncle?' I asked. 'Why, no, Uncle, how could I,' he said."

It was cold and the young man wrapped the blanket about his feet.

"Well, as I was saying, he had just one more year before he would have entered college, and all would have been well, but one night after I had happened to remark that the house seemed nice and clean, a knock came at the door. Three policemen came in and asked for my

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boy. They went to his room and from the closet under some clothes they took a package of books and arrested him. There I stood, a big strong man weak like water, repeating to myself—‘How did they know where to look’—Why was I so weak at that moment? Why didn’t I tear the three of them to shreds? When I heard him from the bottom of the stairs call to me, ‘Uncle, I never saw the books before in my life!’—I should have jumped upon the three dogs and crushed them like grapes. But something sucked the strength from my veins and I stood speechless and helpless.

“The police gave me no information and the man in the black cloak was not to be found. And I asked myself—‘Why did the police not enter his room?’ And soon I put two and two together and decided that the black man was a spy and would never show his face again. But hardly had two weeks passed when before me he stood, black, smiling and long as a funeral.—‘Is he a spy?’ I asked myself, ‘or is he not?’ I looked hard into his face and sometimes I was sure he was and then again I would decide otherwise. How could I tell? How could I find out? Of one thing I was certain and that was that the boy was gone—my professor was gone.

“I have always been a simple man and there

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are many things that I do not understand, and cannot explain. But I remember those days and how I felt. I ate little and worked in fits and slowly a stranger grew up in me—as if it had been inside of me all the time and had been hiding at the bottom of my feet. He grew and grew and almost pressed my insides out until he filled my whole body—a strange person, but he gave me strength and filled my blood with a wild desire to tear the world into little pieces, as you would a letter. A returned letter. I picked up a five-foot wagon-axle, removed the bolts and placed it beside the forge. Now and again I would lift it and weigh it in my hand. It felt as light as a feather and I kept it near me—for the next policeman. . . . But at night I was tortured by a question that I couldn't answer—'Is he a spy or is he not? Has he sold my boy?'

"Have you ever felt a stranger in you . . . a different person who thinks with your head and acts with your own hands but is not yourself at all? It's the stranger that talks for you and does what you want to do but he says the same thing that you want to say differently and does what you would like to do more directly. . . . Sometimes he would stay with me a week, sometimes a month and sometimes he would

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leave me altogether and make me think that he never again will return.

"Then I watched the dark man closely and after many months decided that he was a spy. He was writing when I entered his room and without turning around he asked—'What can I do for you, my good man?'—'Do for me? Give me back my boy,' I cried. He jumped from the chair and shouted, 'So you accuse me of being a provocateur.'—'I don't know what you are, I only want my boy.' Then he spoke to me for an hour about laws and justice and the people and in the end I didn't know where I began nor what he was. 'I will prove to you,' he said, 'I will show you what I am. Tomorrow night you will go with me.'

"The next evening he kept his word and I took some tools and went with him. We walked about a mile, came to an old wooden house and went up three flights of stairs. Instead of knocking on the door he knocked on the wall beside the door and soon it was opened.—'I have brought a man to look at the stove,' he said as we entered. Then I went over to the stove and examined it and while I was doing this he came to me and whispered—'You see this is where the revolutionists' committee meets, keep it to yourself and I will do what I can for you.'

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Then I hammered a bit in the stove to make a little noise, and as I was leaving he again came over to me and whispered—‘Well, are you satisfied—is this a police-station?’ I walked home alone, confused and—such a strong man like myself—and I couldn’t figure it out.

“Soon the stranger again arose within me and I worked like seventeen demons. The sparks flew from my hammer so that nobody could enter the shop—I would forget to eat and forget to go home. One night I even slept in the shop and early in the morning as I was approaching the house I saw two policemen stand before his window. They tapped, and he himself, wrapped in his black cape, opened the window, gave them a letter and closed it again. I saw this with my own eyes. What was I to do?

“I went into the house and tried to figure out what was the best plan. If he only had my boy in his pocket it would be easy. Then I would take hold of him and shake him till his pockets were empty. But he hasn’t my boy in his pocket. Yet I did not want to let him get away so I decided to sit down on the floor in front of his door.

“When he opened the door, there I was. ‘What do you want?’—he said in a frightened

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voice.—‘Want my boy!’ and I got up. ‘I haven’t your boy!’ ‘Yes, you have—you took him from me!’ He could see how I shook and he turned pale. Then he snatched a revolver from his pocket and cried—‘Stand back’—and before I could put my hands on him he closed the door between us and was gone. Gone like a flash. And from that day to this I never saw him again.

“In the afternoon of the same day two policemen came and took his baggage away in a cab. The woman cried her eyes out and said that I took the bread from her mouth and for that reason she had to drink a whole bottle of vodka.

“But just about a week after this happened I had good news. A letter. I had a letter from my professor. He wrote me from Siberia. He was sent to the gold-mines and had just arrived. Then all was not lost—at least, I knew he was alive and I sent him money and dictated a long letter to him. And soon I felt the stranger leaving me and again I had happy hours. He wrote me every second week for two years when suddenly it stopped.

“Then after a little time one of my letters came back but I still had hope. I hoped that he had escaped and would write me soon. But when my last letter also came back and in the

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corner was stamped, 'Return to Sender' and on the bottom was written—'Party Dead'—well, that's how it all ended. My little professor dead.

"Now what can happen to me? What can they do to me that can make any difference? Have I not already died? That is why I laugh at the ropes and all the wretched pretenders that grease them. The black man was a police agent working in the revolutionists' ranks.

"Well, the rest is short. I put the letter in my pocket and how I came home I can't remember, but I can see clearly before me the woman already in bed and an empty bottle on the table. She was not asleep, but as I didn't say anything she kept quiet. I removed my coat, took out the letter, opened a drawer and was about to put it away when I discovered a large quantity of money. 'What is this?' I said. 'Where did all this come from? But the woman only answered, 'Go to sleep, you fool.'

"I looked more closely and discovered that several envelopes containing the money were stamped with the police-shield. I shook the woman so hard that she sat up. 'What is this?—Tell me, has the dark man been here again?'—She laughed, 'Every week, you old fool'—'And you took money from him!'—'How then

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do we live—do you think we eat good things from your old horseshoes? Don't be a fool—go to bed.'

" 'With a police agent?' I cried. 'How can it hurt a fool?' she added. I shook like a leaf and there she sat in her drunken calm. 'Well'—she said—'I suppose you won't go to bed till you know everything . . . well, here it goes, and the devil take you with it. . . . It was I who planted the books in your smart professor's room. I did it myself and what is more I was paid a reward!'

" 'So you sold my boy—you sold him!' I cried. But she only laughed. 'Ten rubles—ten rubles reward'—and dropped her drunken head back to the pillow. Then my hands reached out with such power and strength as could have twisted an iron shaft. Every finger became an arm alive with force. , , , And I killed her."

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THE meeting is called to order," shouted the president, rapping on the table with an old fork.

"Silence, please," called someone, as the audience lowered the tone of conversation.

"You will please give your undivided attention," continued the president, "as this meeting is extremely important. Things have come to such a state that our very existence is threatened. The situation is unparalleled in the history of the union. As the hour is late I would suggest that we dispense with the reading of the minutes and get straight to work. The floor is open for discussion."

The meeting took place in the back room of a squalid flat. Yellow gas-lights reflected the green painted walls upon the faces of two dozen beggars crowded into the narrow space. The air was filled with the smell of smoke and rags. The meeting was called to order.

"I would like to impress upon the minds of

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the members the importance of this meeting," said the man with the tattooed forehead. "In former years, as you all know, we had the run of the city practically to ourselves; but now we are threatened with a different state of things. Since the high cost of living many people have come into the streets to follow our profession and although we, at one time, thought of taking them into the union, we see now that it is good we did not.

"However, these men could not earn a living at their former profession and we should tolerate them, to a certain extent. We should even instruct them a little so that in time they will learn that coöperation is more profitable than competition. No matter how untrained and inartistic, we bore with them as a necessary evil. But now things are different; it seems as though everyone has taken to begging. It's impossible to walk through a street without meeting three or four. They are so many that it becomes impossible for skilled workers to earn a living. If we are not to be undermined in our professional rights, something must be done to check this state of affairs."

Then the blind man stood up, removed his blue glasses, and said:

"Our friend is right, something must be

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done. I have been turning the problem over in my mind and to me there appear but three solutions. Either we must unionize the entire crowd, that is, take them into our union and form new branches; or we must protest to the city authorities against the scabbing on our union and require a severe examination for license to practice the profession, or, we must declare 'open shop' and go out and compete with them, relying, of course, on our experience and past training to outdo them. To my mind, these are the only three ways open to us, and all have their objections.

"First, if we take the whole crowd into the union we run great risk of degrading the profession. Professors are begging! In fact it has come to such a state that everyone thinks he can be a beggar as though it were an unskilled trade and not an old, well-founded profession. And as though the profession were without an art. Will we take such men as these into our ranks—men without experience or training—just from the streets?

"No! We must think of some other plan. If we protest to the city authorities against scabbing we injure ourselves, at the start, by appealing to public sympathy; and secondly, it is doubtful whether the authorities would do

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anything in this matter, for they surely realize that in these changing times they themselves may soon be required to seek a new profession. Then my third plan, namely, to declare 'open shop' is also not very good, for it would indeed be difficult. It's hard to compete against a teacher or a former policeman, for no matter how unskilled they are there is something about them that attracts. What is to be done?"

"Does anyone else want the floor?" called the chairman, and as nobody responded he continued:

"Perhaps our colleague Jim will tell us what he thinks of the problems before us. I call upon him as we know him to be a tactful and artistic worker. Perhaps he will explain to us his new method of coping with the situation."

Jim was a man in shreds, the greater part of his clothing consisting of cords and colored rags. He stood up very slowly, looked about and began:

"Friends! Nothing can be solved in our line of work without a good deal of thought. That is why it is silly to think of taking untrained persons into our union. We all agree that it is becoming harder and harder to work in the streets each day. So I said to myself, 'I must think of some plan.' And I did! First,

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I asked myself, 'Who has money now?' And the answer came, 'Those who have made it now.' And who have made it now? The rich people with the estates? No! The middle class, of course, the little brokers, and stock gamblers; the exchange merchants and other profiteers. Therefore I decided to work the offices; the little rooms in the big buildings.

"I took my time the first few days and made observations. Never hurry! I would enter an office slowly and quietly and go straight to the clerk and say softly in a tone of 'have pity': 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.'

"The proprietors of these offices were not to be found. And the clerks were so ignorant that they did not understand that I compared them to foxes and birds. Besides this they held a powerful weapon and that was: 'I am sorry, but the boss is not in.' I had to meet this reply, so I dug up a story and since then have had little difficulty.

"It works something like this; I walk into an office, take off my hat—always slowly, and stand near the door. If I get a fee, well and good; if not, I wait. A little two-by-four clerk

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sits at a large desk, and as soon as I enter, pretends to be extremely busy. After a while he glances up and says, 'I am sorry, but the boss is out.' I do not move and remain as though I did not understand. Again he will look up and say, 'The boss is not in.' And once more, 'What do you want, the boss is not in.'

"Then I say, 'Yes, I see the boss is not in, and as you can give me nothing, please allow me to give you something. Let me tell you a little joke?'

" 'I have no time, don't bother me, the boss is not in,' he replies.

" 'But just a little one, I am sure you will not be sorry,' I insist and start the story:

" 'Once upon a time, there lived a Jew whose name was Moe. Like most men he had two brains in his head, a big and a little brain. His big brain was very, very fine for he used it often. It was the brain he made his money with. But the little brain was very weak for with this brain he gave charity. I do not say that Moe was a miser, but I do know that his little brain had so little exercise that it became limp and began to rot. This became so serious that it had to be taken from his head by a surgical operation. And as, according to the Hebrew religion, no part of the human body

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may be thrown away, the little brain was placed in a cigar-box and buried in the cemetery. A small tombstone no bigger than a cash book marked the spot with the inscription:

Moe's Little Brain.

“ ‘On the day of atonement, according to the Hebrew faith, the Lord walks among the dead with his large ledger checking the names. He knocks on a stone or grave, and those that are buried answer, present or accounted for. But when the Lord knocked on the little stone there came no answer. And again he knocked and there came no answer. He compared the inscription with his book and called, “Moe’s Little Brain, are you there?” And with these words he struck the earth such a blow with his staff that it almost split in two, as he placed his ear close to the grave.

“ ‘And then came a little thin voice from below: “Please mister, the boss is not in.” ’

“This story averages exactly fifty cents. It is a high class entertainment that I propose to give and naturally the fees must be according to the work and skill of the practitioner. When the offices are exhausted I will find some other plan; but I will not go back to the streets with the common scum of the earth. If a man wants

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to be a bricklayer he must first know that bricks are made of clay. If he wants to be a lawyer he must know that documents are made of words. And if he wants to succeed as a beggar he must realize that the foundation of the profession is psychology."

The audience listened attentively to the advice of Jim and after a brief silence there were many calls for the floor.

"I would just like to ask a question," said the man with one arm. "In former years a great deal of our income was derived from the church steps and a good deal more in the name of religion but now that the free-thought movement is attracting such wide interest, and that anti-religious literature is sold on almost every corner, is not another source of our incomes threatened? My question is this: Is there any way of deriving profit from the masses who have forsaken the church? Would it be proper to ask for fees in the name of Voltaire?"

"Our comrade Jim," said the man who could dislocate his left hip and thereby make that leg three inches shorter, "has just touched upon the very subject. I should consider the story he is using now as a mild and inoffensive satire. In work of this kind, style is important. Under

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the cloak of art much can be done. However, his first quotation regarding the foxes and the birds is a method of which I would not approve as it appears to me to offend our religious clients. It is irony; and when that is used against religion the message becomes agnostic and therefore offensive to certain people. However, when a little satire is used it tends to create an impression of non-religion which is not antagonistic or offensive. In working the non-religious masses we should be extremely careful not to offend the others for they are our oldest and still our best clients."

"The hour is growing late," said the president, "and I feel that we are more or less digressing from the main issue. Also, because of the complexity of the questions before us which cannot be decided tonight, I would suggest that this meeting be adjourned till next Sunday night, when we will hear the report of the ways and means committee. A full attendance is requested and please be early so we may start on time. As I hear no objection I call this meeting adjourned." As they hobbled out the president put away the old fork, dimmed the yellow gas light and began unwinding the rags from his legs. In another minute he was asleep and dreaming of his empire of beggars.

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A STRAW can break a camel's back but you have no idea of the amount of trouble that a bit of reed may cause. Let me explain. In an orchestra every instrument has its own character and every musician must give way, to a certain extent, to his instrument. Many people think that the man controls his instrument, but more often than not it is the instrument that does most of the ruling. On the whole, we musicians are a tame lot and most of our instruments are, in a way, kind. Perhaps "kind" is not the right word—you might call it meek or bland—but that makes no difference because you know what I mean. As a rule musicians are tame and their music harmless, but every now and then there is something that breaks loose. You never break a heavy G string, it is always the thin E that snaps. And that is the way it is in life. A time comes when something is bound to break loose and when it does it is like the piercing shriek of a high-

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strung nervous woman . . . something out of harmony with everything. But modern music requires it and it takes all things to make a good orchestra.

Yet I really have no complaint with myself. The cello is a peaceful instrument and I have had fairly steady work with the symphony for over twenty years. But I guess it is all a matter of luck and I never looked for any trouble. I do my work and teach my pupils and when evening comes around I go and get a good glass of beer and that ends my day. But some are different. It takes all kinds of people to make a world and all kinds of characters to fill an orchestra.

The bass fiddle is a steady instrument, always on time and never looking for trouble. If you lend money to a bass-fiddler he will always pay . . . sometimes a little delayed, but that is only because he is big and slow. But a clarinet is different. He will pay also, but he likes to drink and talk and have a good time. It's a tricky instrument, but at the same time clever. Always to the point, in a quiet way, and not at all like his younger brother, the oboe. Be careful of the oboe. Never trust an oboe, for you can never tell what he will do.

Meisterberg, my teacher, used to say—

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"Never fool with the oboe player because you can't fool with a fool." Sometimes when he was conducting he would rap on the stand and say—"Once more from the cadenza" and under his breath he would murmur so that only those near him could hear—"The oboe is as stupid as a tenor."

Never trust an oboe. Sometimes he plays and sometimes he doesn't play. It seems to depend on his humor and at the same time the whole orchestra must keep tune to him. You can't tune an oboe . . . it just plays as he is. And after everybody is all tuned up to him, he is just as likely as not to quit playing. You can never trust an oboe.

Twenty years I've played with different orchestras, and never yet did I know the oboe player not to be a clown. If he doesn't put his feet out to trip you he will drop rosin into your instrument or loosen your bow. There was Peter Schmidt, for instance, who played with the Harmony Group; he was sixty-five years old and never once did he miss a chance to stick his foot out into the aisle. It didn't matter who it was. It was always a joke to him and its humor never wore off. If you broke your neck—he'd laugh!

But that is not the story I wanted to tell.

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What I wanted to tell was about this fellow Fred. You can never trust an oboe player. Like Meisterberg used to say, "You can't fool with a fool."

Fred never joked very much but he was a clown just the same. The way he wore his little hat was enough. You could see at a glance he was an oboe player even if he hid the instrument under his coat. And sometimes he did this too. He would take the instrument apart, just before we had to go up on the stage, so that he could walk on empty-handed like the conductor. Then he would take the different sections out of his pockets and put them together, and look around and grin. This he thought was a great joke. But I always smiled, when no one else did, for he confided in me. A man must tell his troubles to someone. I never laughed at him as the others did because I know what an oboe is like and what it can do.

These young fellows that study for a few years and show off with a little smattering of modern music . . . and carry Scriabin scores in their pockets, what do they know about music? But when you are trained in Europe, and you have had such teachers as Meisterberg then you know enough to respect everything. And you know that it takes all kinds of charac-

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ters to make an orchestra and you know that the oboe is like the piercing cry of a nervous woman.

In a way the oboe player is not to be blamed for acting queerly. He often can't help it. I once heard a fellow expound a theory about the oboe. He claimed that the rapid vibration of the little reed in the player's mouth loosened the nerves and even disarranged the brain. It is like the last straw that breaks a camel's back. Only it takes much more time. Anyway it was a theory that seemed to fit in well with the character of the instrument and with most of the players. If you think of the oboe and the way it cries wildly, like a Frenchman through his nose, you will understand what I mean.

This fellow Fred, whom I started to tell you about, was with us for six years when suddenly, without any warning, his playing became shrill and wild. It would go right through you like a cold knife. The conductor would rap for *piano* and for *pianissimo* but Fred would never hear. In the dressing-room we would argue with him but all he ever replied was—"The reed—the reed! It beats—it beats!" and he would hold his head.

This lasted for about two months when suddenly one morning he burst into the room just as I was in the middle of giving a pupil a lesson,

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and shouted: "I killed her! I killed her! The reed it beats—it beats. I couldn't stand it any longer, I had to do it. What shall I do, I think I killed her!" He threw himself on his knees and crushed his hat down tight upon his head. "It beats—it beats . . . I had to do it."

Picture such a scene to yourself. He was kneeling on the floor and held his arms around his head. The pupil dropped his bow and just vanished. What was I to do? He was in a terrible state and I could do nothing with him. "You think you killed your wife?" I asked. "Was it an accident and why did you have to do it?" I tried to calm him. I tried to pull him into a chair. I shook him. "Why?" I repeated, but all I could get out of him were the words: "It beats! It beats!"

I was sure he had worked himself up over nothing but you dare not trust an oboe player. I got down on the floor and pleaded with him to pull himself together and be a man. But when he saw me on my knees he began to weep like a five-year-old girl and between gasps cried: "What am I to do. Send for a doctor or something. I had to do it but I didn't mean to do it. The oboe did it! It beats! It hammers in my head. It makes me cry out when I want to be quiet. It makes me sad when everyone is

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happy. It makes me run into the street without a hat and suddenly it commands me to be still and holds me bound to the ground like a rock. It beats. . . . And I am the slave. Nobody knows what is inside of me but the oboe knows everything. My innermost thoughts it knows and it beats them out when I don't want them known. A cruel master that beats a slave. His slave! Ha, ha! Yes, I am laughing! But you won't laugh when I tell you the discovery I made. I might have known it years ago but I never suspected . . . who could have told me? I must learn everything for myself and the other day I discovered that it was a woman! Yes . . . the oboe was a woman. A hissing, snaky, jealous woman. Jealous of everything! Jealous of my darling. Jealous of life itself. I might have guessed it before. I might have known it. But now it's too late. Too late. She made me kill her. What am I to do? It beats! It beats!"

In this manner he rambled on and on. Tears dropped from his face. But I had no time to lose. I quickly put on my hat and coat and was about to run over to his house when suddenly I stopped and said to myself—"No one will understand him. He will get into mischief. He must not be left alone. Musicians are

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different, we settle things in our own way.' I dragged him to the side of the room and locked him into the clothes-closet. As I turned the key in the lock I could hear his muffled cries. "She was jealous. It beats! She made me do it."

I rushed through the streets. A confusion of thoughts ran through my mind. I was certain that it was some foolish accident that had completely unnerved him. Yet I feared that she might be in need, though if you knew her it would be hard to imagine it. I must tell you now that if he was queer then she was just as queer only an octave higher. Fred was skinny as a lead-pencil, but she was a toothpick, a toothpick sharp at both ends. How they lived I can't understand. You never saw them eat and they seemed never to sleep. First of all they were vegetarians—but they never ate vegetables . . . only nuts and fruit. And even at that they didn't eat much fruit but always nibbled on the peels. It's a theory they had. Where he found her I can't say, but it would be difficult to find another. Then she played violin, and for a time quite well; but how she could endure his practicing on the oboe, I could never understand.

After a woman is married a year or two you

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would naturally expect her to broaden out, but with her it was the reverse. She grew thinner every day. Each time I saw her I was certain that she would not live till the next day. . . . With her everything seemed reversed. When she made a dress she turned the goods wrong side out, her pictures she hung upside down, photographs she cut into triangles, her clothes she would fold up and her shoes she would hang in the closet. After a year or so she stopped playing her violin. I do not know whether it was because of his oboe or because you had to play the notes from left to right and this to her seemed wrong. With her everything seemed wrong!

I forgot to tell you they never drank tea or coffee . . . they had an idea it was poison. And they didn't believe in belts, or garters or anything that went around because they said it stopped the circulation. He was thin and as bony as a lead-pencil and she was like a toothpick. In the whole wide world I doubt if you could find a queerer couple.

Then you couldn't talk to them, because they had such funny ideas about . . . about everything. The world to her was a system. Everything she blamed on what she called 'the system.' Now I know that for fifty-cent pupils you

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have one system and for dollar pupils you have another system. But she was a socialist, and to her the whole world was one system. He did not bother so much about this, but if you ever spoke to him about music. . . . Often he explained to us for hours why the orchestra is arranged wrong and how it should be made right by putting the kettle-drums in the middle and the fiddles all around the back. It's almost as bad as the joke about the army captain who wanted the band fixed so that the little men played the small instruments and the big men played the big. . . . Yes, he wanted the drums in the middle and he explained it in a reasonable way. While he was talking it sounded all right and often I thought he was a great man—a genius. But when I went home and thought it over, then I felt he was just a plain damn fool.

Well, that's the way they lived. Either he was a genius or a damn fool and whatever he was, she was the same, only an octave higher. All skin and bones. . . . They were married four years when he began playing with that shrill cry. And the penetrating nasal twang from his oboe would cut right through you. The conductor would rap and shout, but it did no good. His one oboe was enough wood-

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wind for fourteen orchestras. And he would cry—"The reed—the reed. It beats—it beats."— And he would hold his head. A straw can break a camel's back and it seems he couldn't stand it a minute longer. All this came back to me as I rushed through the streets. At last I reached the house.

Up the steps I leaped—two at a time. The door was closed. I put my hand on the knob and was just about to open, when my attention was arrested by the playing of a violin. Such playing! 'Who can it be?' I asked myself. 'Where can it be? Impossible!' Yes, it was true. I threw open the door and there she was, sitting between the rounds of a chair that was turned upside down, playing her instrument. Her bony elbow was tied with a handkerchief, but it did not prevent her fiddling the most difficult passages. She appeared not to see me. Words failed me. What could I say? I tried to say something, but when I did she marked time with her foot and beat her loose sandal upon the floor. She did not hear and she did not want to hear. I had nothing to say. And as I came in haste, I left the same way.

Now I had good reason to run. My feet could not travel fast enough. The key was in

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my hand. I held it so tight it left a mark in my palm. I made straight for the closet, but I fumbled with the key in the lock and as I was trying to open the door, I heard strange sounds like the cracking of nuts. A scraping, grinding, snapping sound. 'Good God'—I thought, 'he has gone mad.' But when I opened the door there he sat on a suit-case, and under his feet were the fragments of his oboe. He was crushing it to bits.

The excitement that followed is hard to relate. It was one long yell of confusion. He ran through the streets and I after him. People must have thought me chasing a thief. When I arrived, she was already in his arms. . . . Married people understand things that no one else can. And musicians don't have to talk very much.

But what was it? It was difficult to make head or tail of it. He had one story and she had quite another. I had to piece the fragments together and as I made it out, it all happened because of his hair, which she objected to, because it would hang down over his eyes when he practiced on the oboe. She said his hair was wrong and that morning she took the shears while he was playing and began to clip his locks. Did you ever hear of anything

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so ridiculous? He kept on playing until suddenly he realized what was happening. Then he snatched the shears and flung them at her. They cut her arm. She reeled and fell to the floor. I think she was more surprised than hurt. At any rate he was confused, frightened and imagined the worst. Not knowing what to do he ran to me. No wonder the pupil disappeared when he burst into the room.

In the end it all turned out pretty well. She has gone back to the violin, and gives concerts, while he has charge of the battery in our symphony. Often when I look up to his corner, he will point his drum-stick to the feet of the conductor. That is just to tell me that the arrangement is bad and that his drums should be in the center. He explains his plans to everybody and some day, just to convince him that he is wrong, we may try it.

Now that is about all there is—excepting the pupil. The pupil came back the following week and said that he was unable to practice because he had left his bow. Well, I was going to give him a lesson of a different kind. I was about to tell him, that when people are married four or five years, a certain beating creeps in which, with reverses and low ebbs of fortune, can be magnified to a horrible and wild

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tom-tom, making them both slaves to the monotony of the repetition. Making them both do things that they would be sorry for. Yes, I was going to give him this kind of lesson, but I felt that he wouldn't understand and besides, I hadn't that much time. You know, you have to have one system for dollar pupils and another for fifty-cent pupils.

THUMBS

THUMBS

“**H**IS fingers are all thumbs,” said the General one day of an orderly who was cleaning his boots. And from that day on the orderly was called “Thumbs.”

It is common, in Russia, for a nickname to stick to a man for the rest of his life. And Thumbs appeared to become more thumbs daily. He seemed to grow more awkward and heavy-handed. His lack of manual skill seemed to come to the foreground more and more.

He became the unconscious clown of the regiment.

If a plate was heard to fall in an adjoining room, someone would snatch out his purse and cry—“Ten to one it’s butter-fingered Thumbs.”

He would bring in wood for the fireplace in the officers’ cabin, and his coat would catch the end of a saber lying on the table. The saber would swing around and turn over a candelabra, the candles would roll on the floor.

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Thumbs, after depositing his load, would return to set things right, but in picking up two of the candles would step on the other three. His audience would roar with laughter. And, at first, Thumbs too would smile, but as time went on he became simpler, blanker, and entirely indifferent.

"Bungler Thumbs will die of stupidity," a soldier would shout to his mate as Thumbs would creep on all fours under the table—to pick up the cigarettes.

"Why keep the idiot?" the mate would reply.

But this was only said for Thumbs' benefit. They knew very well how they missed him the two nights when he stood guard-duty for absent-mindedness.

It was on one of these nights that Thumbs showed his teeth for the first time during his life as a soldier. A young lieutenant was returning at midnight from a neighboring camp to which he had lost a hundred rubles in a brisk game of speculation.

"Who goes there?" called Thumbs, in a questioning rather than a challenging tone.

"He is too stupid to sleep at night," the lieutenant mumbled in an undertone, and approaching, cried:

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“Attention!”

Thumbs stood leaning on the rifle and asked for the officer's pass.

“What, you bungler, you want my pass? Here it is!” And saying this he delivered a smart smack on Thumbs' cheek.

Thumbs almost capsized, but recovered himself enough to send out his heavy foot and kick the departing officer. He then took his gun by the barrel and waited ready for a return blow. But the officer thought it best not to disturb him and walked on.

Not knowing that the officer did not have permission to be out at night, Thumbs thought that he would suffer for his haste the next morning. But he soon dismissed the thought from his mind with a shrug of his massive shoulders. “I'm too strong,” he mumbled, “but I don't care.”

As indifferent as he was to his weakness so was he also indifferent to his strength.

Once when his regiment was at the front it was Thumbs' duty to keep the buckets filled with water, clean the trenches, and chase the rats, with stick in hand, away from his section.

If a small mortar or mule had to be lifted out, Thumbs was called. In spite of his good nature he was never popular with the rank and

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file, for officers' flunkeys were always regarded with a good deal of suspicion.

The regiment returned from the front with comparatively few losses. Thumbs, in his simple-minded way, often wondered why he was not killed, but did not consider himself fortunate. His indifference grew, but he also became more and more inarticulate. After a while he began mumbling to himself.

"Hey, Thumbs, come here and clean up the mess," shouted the doctor, as he finished his morning's dressings. Thumbs went, turned over a basin and a jar, but finally set the place in order.

Sometimes the officers would set things about in a card-house fashion and call Thumbs in to expose his awkwardness. Then he had to clean up again and set things right.

"What a happy nature he has," one would say.

"All fools are happy," another would reply.

Once the doctor was speaking to a sergeant.

"Call a rose by any other name, and it will smell as sweet, or call Thumbs by any other name you choose and he will remain the same heavy-handed bungler he always was," said the doctor.

"I don't agree with you, Doctor," replied the

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sergeant. "I really think the name has a good deal to do with the object; as two people, after they are married a long time, get to look alike. I used to have a horse called Bessie. She was good on the farm, but absolutely worthless in the army. I sold her to the Ordnance Department and the captain there called her Pride, and she became a good horse. I wish I had kept her. As for Thumbs, I think that if he were called something else he would be quite different. You see, he thinks he is expected to be clumsy and has got into the habit. He——"

"But you can't teach an old dog new tricks," broke in the doctor.

"Perhaps you are right, you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but I think that if he were called something else he would not be the clown he now is."

"But he is so stupidly amusing," said the doctor.

"Yes, it is true, but you know I sometimes think since he has become so silent that he will some day do mischief. He is very powerful."

"What!" laughed the doctor. "Thumbs powerful? why you can lead him around like a baby. He is an idiot."

As time went on Thumbs became almost completely silent, except for his mumbling.

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His big, burly body, like a small mountain of flesh, became more and more gawky. He sat on the grass one day, shining boots and mumbling to himself:

"That was a nice dog—I called him Victor—could do tricks—walk on hind legs—lick my hand. Stolen, or maybe dead. They played a trick on me—but it makes no difference. The army is losing, but I don't care. Soon they will march us back five miles. That's good. I will walk in the grass beside the road. It does one good to be in the country. Rich people know—they go every summer. He could jump as high as your hand—loved sugar. Gave him all of mine——Tomorrow they must march the army back, but I don't care."

And so it was—two days later the regiment was sent three miles back. Thumbs walked in the grass and found a wounded sparrow. He spread his handkerchief beside the bird and, not trusting his too powerful fingers, got a dried leaf and rolled the sparrow onto the cloth. He then picked it up carefully by its four corners and put it into the can that was tied to his belt.

"Come on, you fool—get onto the road," called an officer, and Thumbs marched on in the grass.

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This time the regiment settled itself in a deserted village. The officers took the best houses. Thumbs carried the trunks to the different rooms and at night quartered himself in the kitchen. Here he found an old dome-shaped cake-cover. It was made of wire mesh, and originally used to keep flies off food. He got a board and placed the handkerchief and sparrow carefully underneath, and with a string tied the wire dome to the board.

The next day he improved his cage by placing in it a little doll's cup, which he had found in the yard and filled with water. In three days the bird improved, and in a week it chirped as Thumbs, with his enormous hands, would gently rub a bit of bread along the wire and thereby cause crumbs to fall inside.

"I don't understand," said the doctor one day, coming out of the kitchen, "I don't understand how so clumsy a fellow can be so tender with a bird."

It seemed as though the doctor changed his attitude toward Thumbs, for several days later as Thumbs was cleaning his room, he said:

"I suppose you heard about the revolution in Petrograd." Thumbs stopped his work and shrugged his shoulders. "Well, we had a meeting last night," continued the doctor, "and de-

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cided to side with the new party." And saying this he took a red rose from the table, and stuck it through a safety-pin in Thumbs' coat.

It was not until Thumbs left the room that he noticed all the officers were wearing a similar red flower. He was silent, but proud.

The men were playing cards in the afternoon, and called for tea. Thumbs did his best, but toward the end of his task upset a tumbler. Two men sprang quickly to their feet to avoid the splash. One of these was the little lieutenant whom Thumbs had once asked for his pass. This seemed the chance he had been waiting for. He walked up to Thumbs, tore the flower from its stem, and dashed the petals in his face. The petals scattered. The men at the table laughed. Thumbs merely shrugged his shoulders and went out to bring a towel.

"You can't insult the fool," said the lieutenant, as he got back to the table.

Thumbs picked up the petals, and as he placed them in the bird-cage he stuck out his tongue and shook his head at the sparrow, and mumbled: "Not for them—not for them."

The next morning Thumbs was called out for drill. The little lieutenant was in command. The soldiers marched back and forth in a four-acre field all morning. At noon, Thumbs and

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three others were lined into an awkward squad and, in charge of a corporal, marched and drilled all the afternoon.

The corporal reported that Thumbs was wilfully confusing commands and ridiculing his superiors. The corporal was a new man and lived at the other end of the town and did not know Thumbs.

He was given guard-duty for the night.

The next morning there was a commotion at the officers' house. Thumbs was missing and the work remained undone. The little lieutenant had carried his joke too far.

"The devil won't take him—he is strong like a bull," someone said.

"He'll be in soon, and he'll do all the work."

But the doctor was angry and shook his finger at the lieutenant.

"If you are unlucky in cards," he said, "you are probably lucky with women—one thing makes up for the other, and in the future if you want to get angry, go to the front and take it out on the enemy."

The lieutenant flushed red just as Thumbs came into the house, dragging his rifle along behind.

The doctor lowered his voice and continued—

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"If this affair is reported to the General, I know who will get the worst of it."

Thumbs went to the kitchen and, before he did anything else, went to the sparrow on the table. He tumbled into a chair and started rubbing crumbs into the cage. The bird seemed to know him. After a minute or two he got up, changed the water for the bird and took a long drink himself.

Again he seated his husky body beside the bird on the table, and just sat and sat speechlessly admiring the creature in bondage.

In the meantime the officers went out for their morning walk, and as soon as the little lieutenant in the other room found himself alone he burst into the kitchen.

"I'll teach you—you old fool," he cried, as he rushed in. "We will see who will report who."

Thumbs looked up, but was too tired to move.

The lieutenant, seeing that his words had no effect, boiled with anger, and jerked the cloth off the table.

The cage fell to the floor and, without a moment's hesitation, he crushed it beneath his boot. "I'll teach you how to play with birds!"

Thumbs rose slowly—the table trembled.

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Two steps forward and he took hold of the officer by the waist.

"Let go! What are you doing?"

But Thumbs lifted him high, turned him feet up, and dashed him head first to the floor. It was a tremendous crash.

The officers had lingered before the house, heard the noise, and were wondering what had happened. But Thumbs was already at the door, and called them in, numbly waving his monstrous hand.

"Come in," he said, in a deep voice that shook the house, "Come—I smashed him with my hands!"

It was the first word he had spoken for a long time.

II

The usual procedure had to be gone through. The military court is a very serious affair—Thumbs was on trial.

He refused to answer to his name and said that he did not remember it; he knew only "Thumbs."

During the trial he was silent and answered but a half-dozen of the hundred questions asked him, and these he answered with a syllable or a shake of his head.

Finally, the presiding officer turned to a friend who was seated also behind the massive desk at the judge's right, and said in a whisper, "It is hard to get very much out of him, but the fellow probably acted on provocation. Crime is crime, and there is no getting away from it, but some crimes are worth the price."

Then changing his attitude to the prisoner, the judge addressed him in a questioning voice, as though he were talking to a child.

"Listen to me, Thumbs. Are you listening?"

"Yes," said Thumbs, in an undertone.

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"Do you know that you killed a man?"

Thumbs nodded.

"Do you know that the man you killed was a superior officer?"

Again the prisoner nodded.

"Now, tell me, Thumbs—are you listening?—tell me, did you mean to kill him when you laid hands on him?"

"I really must be going," interrupted the friend at the judge's right, glancing at his watch.

"No, no, stay a bit," quickly replied the judge, who had kept his eyes fixed on Thumbs, and only allowed his right hand to move down on his friend's knee to stay a departing guest.

"Tell us, Thumbs," repeated the judge, "did you have the idea in your head to kill the officer when you laid your hands on him, or——?"

Thumbs nodded.

"Why? Are you listening to me, Thumbs? Why did you want to kill your officer? Why?"

Thumbs was silent. During the interval the friend at the right spoke: "Really, I must be going. I have an appointment with the major—it is almost one o'clock."

"One o'clock, already!" replied the aston-

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ished judge. "It's too late. I can't let you go, now; you must lunch with me."

"No, I thank you just the same, but——"

"Tell us, Thumbs——" interrupted the judge, in an effort to get a reply from the prisoner during the distraction. "Tell us, why—why—did you want to kill the little officer?"

"He killed my bird," mumbled Thumbs.

"And even if he did kill your bird, was that all the reason you had for killing him?"

"He killed my bird," repeated Thumbs.

"Were you very angry, Thumbs, when you saw your bird crushed?"—then turning to his friend, the judge said—

"I won't be a minute longer—I have a letter from home I want you to read. We will lunch in just a minute."

From this moment he became more stern with the prisoner.

"Listen to me, Thumbs. Do you know that this is a serious offense?"

Thumbs was silent.

"Do you know why you are here?" Then whispering to his neighbor—"In just a minute."

"Tell me, Thumbs—why are you here?"

"You wanted me to be here," replied the man on trial.

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"But why did I want you to be here? Why were you arrested?"

Thumbs looked vaguely into space and shrugged his shoulders.

"You know why you were arrested, Thumbs? Do you realize that this is a serious offense?"

"I know," said the unfortunate man.

"Now pay attention, Thumbs—listen to me. Do you know what will become of you if you are found guilty?"

Thumbs shook his head.

"Do you know what the penalty is for the crime you have committed?"

"Do you want me to do something?" asked Thumbs. "Tell me what I must do?"

"Answer my question, Thumbs. Do you know that you will die if you are found guilty?"

Thumbs shook his head, then added:

"No, I won't die."

"It's no use—he is a fool," said the judge to his neighbor, after a long breath. Then changing his attitude to the prisoner, he said severely, "Thumbs, stand up!"

Thumbs obeyed.

"Before I pronounce sentence upon you have you anything to say in your own defense?"

Thumbs did not reply.

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"Have you anything to say?" repeated the judge, more emphatically.

"I have nothing to tell you," said Thumbs, slowly. "You tell me—do you want me to do something?—I didn't want to come here. You sent for me. I can't tell you anything," looking down at his hands, "but I am strong." With these words he placed his hands on the end of the judge's desk and gave it a shake. "I am strong—I can smash it to bits; tell me what I must do."

The officers turned white and jumped to their feet, as one of them shrieked:

"Take him away! Take him out!"

And the puzzled Thumbs was led away.

III

In the afternoon an officer, decorated with many medals, went before the cell and read a paper announcing to Thumbs that he was found guilty and would be executed; but Thumbs seemed to pay no attention.

Fearing that the condemned man was not aware of his fate, the warden was instructed to repeat the verdict. This he did in the evening as he brought the prisoner a tray of food from the officers' table.

At night the priest went into the cell; he had been there once before during the afternoon.

"You do not seem to understand. Thumbs, you are not making yourself ready," said the priest, as he sat down on the bench beside the unfortunate man.

Thumbs hardly looked up.

"Yes, Thumbs, the army is retreating three more miles. Tomorrow, they will move—it will be a busy day—but they will leave you behind. Prepare yourself."

"I don't care—it isn't my army," mumbled Thumbs.

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"Prepare to meet your Maker, Thumbs," answered the priest, fingering his cross.

Thumbs merely shrugged his shoulders, and after a time shook his head.

"No," he mumbled. "They won't kill me. They aren't strong enough. He killed my bird, but they can't kill me. They may shoot all they like—it won't bother me." He went on in his rambling fashion. "The army is losing. I don't care—it isn't my army. Tomorrow, they will shoot Thumbs; I don't care. This isn't my body. They won't kill me." And so he went on and on.

Even the priest soon grew weary and left him to himself.

He was watched during the night, lest his monstrous hands should tear up the prison floor and grind the wood into splinters. But nothing happened. He slept a bit, but most of the time sat quietly on the bench. There were one or two moments, when his large, sinewy hands would seem to stretch forward, and one felt that now he would break. Now would seem the moment when, confronted with the horrible reality, he would suddenly rise up like a trapped beast, enraged, wreck the prison, and throw the guards from the window—or he would slowly sink down upon his knees and

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pray, like a man condemned to die, first raising his awkward hands and then his mumbling head and finally creeping humbly on all-fours on the prison floor and weeping inwardly. But nothing happened.

The night passed quietly.

In the morning the yard was filled with soldiers. Thumbs was led from his cell, walking briskly.

He stopped before the captain and said:

"Tell me, what do you want me to do?"

"Go with your guard!" retorted the officer, who feared a trick from the powerful prisoner. But although he could easily have broken the handcuffs Thumbs marched on. . . .

When the awkward body sank into a pile, the stem of the flower which the doctor had given Thumbs still hung from his coat, and swayed gently in the breeze.

A MOSCOW REHEARSAL

A MOSCOW REHEARSAL

THE rehearsal had already begun. The orchestra was dark and the stage so lit that the dust in the ornate plaster-work about the lower boxes showed to its greatest advantage.

A humble cottage room was represented in a set painted entirely with burnt umber. A door at the right, a window and stove at the left, a table in the center covered with a pleasant blue-and-white cloth, and one solitary figure in an armchair completed the scene.

In the front rows of the orchestra sat several people prominent in the theatrical world. Hats and coats were piled along the musicians' rail. The director stood in the center aisle at about the sixth row shouting his directions. His face seemed long and sour as though it had been pressed in at the sides by a lemon-squeezer. From time to time he would turn his back upon the stage and walk up the aisle bending over and nodding his head as though he were climbing a hill.

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The electricians would creep in now and again from the side and change one or two of the amber lamps in the footlights. The actress on the stage was made up with brown paint to give her age. She rose from the arm-chair and walked up and down awaiting the decision of the director. As she would turn or bend one caught a line of bright white skin at the neck of her dress. The brown paint had not been extended low enough.

"No! No! No!" yelled the director—"Take that line over again."

The actress seated herself in the chair, twisted her head about, and said in a deep, clear voice, "I think it is growing colder."

"What is it growing?" shouted the director.

"I think it is growing colder," repeated the actress.

"I don't see you feel it . . . once more."

This time she shook her shoulders before turning to the window.

"I think it is growing colder."

"No! No! No! Take it over again. Forget that you once played Juliet. You are an old woman now; forget the romance. And don't make it tragic. . . . Don't make it important. . . . You are an old woman and it

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doesn't matter to you. Nothing matters—not even rats. Try it again.”

Now she rubbed her hands together. “I think it is . . .”

“Just a minute, pardon me . . . Paul! . . . Hey Paul! . . . Will somebody please get him up here . . . We are waiting. Hey Paul!”

At last Paul appeared and looked out over the footlights.

“Where is your snow?”

“It's all ready, sir.”

“But where is it?”

“It's ready for the performance.”

“But we want it now—now; don't you understand?”

“If we use it now there won't be so much left for the performance.”

“Spread a sheet and use it over again.”

“But the actors walk over it with their dirty feet—and kick it all over the house.”

“It doesn't matter. We must have snow now. The cue is—‘I think it is growing colder.’ Use what you have now and cut up more paper for the performance.”

“All the paper is already used up.”

“Buy more.”

“Very well, sir.”

During this conversation an old actor crept

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into the theater. His coat was green, patched, and tattered. He walked leaning on his staff, and putting his bundle under an empty seat he proceeded towards the director. His hair was white like new snow, but matted in cords. He walked slowly and hesitated at each step.

"Once more," continued the director.

This time the actress walked over towards the window before she said, "I think it is growing colder."

Then one could see through the soaped glass of the window a fierce fall of snow.

"Paul!—Pardon me a moment . . . Paul! Where is he now? . . . Hey Paul!"

At last Paul appeared.

"Who cut up the snow?"

"The snow?"

"Yes, the snow!"

"What's the matter with it?"

"Did you ever see snowflakes four inches square? Who cut it up?"

"The boys. But they had only one scissors so they tore a good bit."

"It won't do—I tell you now it won't do. Have it cut fine and use some white paper. You have used too much newspaper—the snow looks black like a blizzard in Hell."

Paul left the stage.

A MOSCOW REHEARSAL

"Sorry to trouble you—but once more."

Now the actress had secured a plaid shawl and drawing it about her repeated the lines, "I think it is growing colder."

By this time the old actor was behind the director. "Excuse me," he said tapping the director's arm. "I've played before three emperors. . . . I am still good. Give me a part. . . . I will show you how I can blow the terror of my heart——"

"Sit down! Don't bother me now." Then turning to the stage. "That's better. That's much better. Now let's have it over again. . . . Are you ready, Paul? . . . All right, go ahead!"

Once more she shuddered in the shell of her shawl before saying, "I think it is growing colder."

But the old actor stood in the aisle and now declaimed to himself. "A man may fish with a worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that . . ."

"What do you say about fish?" shouted the director turning about sharply.

"I—I said that I played before three emperors, and I . . ."

"Don't bother me now. Sit down! . . . Paul! Where is Paul? . . . What's the matter

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with the snow? No! No! No! Don't cut it up now; let's have it as it is. . . . Now once more!"

Beads of perspiration came to the forehead of the actress and ran in wavy lines down her painted face. Again she drew the shawl about her and spoke her lines. "I think it is growing colder." At the side of the stage near the door of the set waited two middle-aged men, dressed and painted to represent boys, ready to burst into the room and shout, "Mama, it's snowing." But they had to wait long for their cue.

"Now that's better"—spoke the director. "But I was just thinking that it might be improved. Now let me see. . . . Suppose you try walking toward the stove. Then speak it not to yourself, but to nobody in particular, as though it came unconsciously from your lips."

Again the line was repeated and again the director hesitated.

Once more the old actor touched him on the sleeve. "I have played before three——"

"Don't bother me now! How many times must I ask you to sit down?"

Then Paul came once more to the footlights and announced—"Shake your own snow, I am going to eat."

"Get off the stage!"

A MOSCOW REHEARSAL

He left the stage unbuckling the straps of his overalls and his exit was followed by a sudden fall of snow. A few stray flakes fluttered into the room as the actress again repeated her line. The old actor leaned on his staff and watched the stage with eager eyes.

Passing out into the lobby you again heard as an echo: "Don't bother me now!" And once more it was followed by the everlasting "I think it is growing colder."

A WEDDING FEAST

A WEDDING FEAST

AT last Terenieff was to marry off his daughter.

Early in the spring, while it was still bleak and cold, the Terenieff household removed itself from Moscow to their country home, which consisted of a large stone house of modern construction on a tract of land that allowed the horses a hundred acres of grazing pasture.

From the first day of their arrival preparations were begun. Invitations were scattered broadcast, large stores of provisions were ordered, extra servants taken on, additional stalls built in the barn, and a double-sized flower-bed cultivated by the arbor.

Every day there was something to do. The house was painted fresh from top to bottom. New carpets were added and the old moved back into the servants' wing.

The month directly preceding the wedding was indeed an active one, but the servants only bent under the yoke and groaned. Luba the

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fat cook established herself as Czarina of the kitchen. She issued orders, banged her copper pots, thumped baking pans into her oven, and flipped them out again. At one time she had all three stable boys on the kitchen floor pounding and grinding poppy-seed for her tarts. Then she would yell at the top of her voice, a dozen times a day, "More wood for the fire—where are all the lazy boys? Hey, more wood—I am running an inferno of my own!"

She bossed the coachman, yelled at the farmhands, ordered the boys around; sent the servants on errands, scolded the gardener, threw a plate at the porter, and shooed off the dogs. All because of her cakes.

Then the provisions began to arrive; enough for a small army. The house could not store them all, but Terenieff himself saw that the wines were securely locked in the cellar.

A week before the day set for the wedding, guests began to arrive; and they continued to do so up till the very morning of the ceremony. The good-natured, blue-eyed priest engaged for the occasion began to feel nervous and came every day to ask some question or other and incidentally to remain for dinner. Every day fresh decorations were added to the hall and lower rooms. Several chairs were broken by

A WEDDING FEAST

people standing upon them, but it did not matter. Only Luba eyed it all from the doorway of her inferno and remarked, "What a lot of dirt there will be!"

The guests brought their children and servants and the children's servants and the servants' children. And the children brought their dogs, cats, rabbits, parrots, pet turtles, fish, and canaries, not to mention pop-guns, balloons, mousetraps, and other contraptions so dear to young hearts.

Luba fed them all from her inferno. She had special food for the babies, roasted seeds for the birds, cabbage for the rabbits, crumbs for the fish, bones for the dogs, and insides for the cats. Only the pet turtles she refused to notice. "I won't cook for reptiles!"

Now the porter kept well out of the kitchen and became sort of sergeant-at-arms and general separator. He separated the dogs from the cats, the cats from the rabbits, the children from fruit trees, and the horses from the grain bins.

On the morning before the wedding the carriages were wheeled out of the open shed and a long table built, the boards of which extended from one end to the other. In the afternoon the groom and four of his best

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friends all in sparkling uniforms and varnished boots arrived, and immediately started a game of cards. And now Terenieff himself unlocked the wine cellar, and Luba's cakes were released from the kitchen in mountainlike loads on large metal trays. Toward evening the good-natured priest again arrived to get acquainted with the groom and incidentally to remain for supper. After the evening meal the children grew fretful, quarrelled with one another, and had to be sent to bed.

Early the next morning one could hear Luba's voice pierce and hasten on the coming dawn as she cried for more wood. She awoke the roosters who started crowing with such zeal that one would imagine that they had overslept and were apologizing. The gardener came limping along the yard waking up his stiffened leg. The sleepy stable-boys pretended to busy themselves with the harnesses, but only succeeded in entangling the traces. Then the device for raising water from the well started groaning and creaking and the horses hearing this kicked at the sides of their stalls. A donkey brayed in the pasture and soon the children were all awake and started the day with an activity so intense that there could be no rest, peace, or contentment for anyone.

A WEDDING FEAST

While the bridal party were eating their breakfast a slight commotion occurred in the yard. To the joy and pleasure of the children one of the guests' horses was harnessed by mistake with an old mare to an unfamiliar carriage. The horse shied, broke the strap of his collar, and sprinted off with flying ends of loose traces behind him.

Soon, however, the grand assortment of vehicles stood before the house and everyone rode off amid noise, cheers, and clatter to church. Even the stable boys went along hanging onto the rear of the last wagon.

Only fat Luba remained behind in her inferno, and for want of company, from sheer monotony she yelled, and ordered herself about.

The church was filled, and the gentle priest so preoccupied that he almost forgot where he was. The village girls had proud bright ribbons to hold their tightly braided hair from unraveling. During the ceremony one of the children suddenly grew frightened at the spectacle, which to their minds must ever seem queer, and began crying in terrible shrieks until she was removed from the building. The mother was greatly annoyed, but the wilful child refused to reënter the church.

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The party returned to the house, the bride and groom leading at a gallop in the first carriage escorted by four officers on horseback with sabers drawn in parade fashion. When the gate to the estate was reached the escorting officer waited for the bridal carriage. When this arrived they saluted with their quivering sabers.

On the lawn before the house, however, already there was encamped a small regiment of youths who had invited themselves and must have passed the church while the ceremony was in progress, but had not felt it worth their while to stop. They had also refused to stop at a village inn three miles before their destination although the inducements were strong. It was while passing this inn that they met with a group of twenty Caucasian soldiers in native dress on horseback and turned down their strong recommendation of the apple wine.

The Caucasians, realizing the seriousness of the refusal, decided to accompany the determined youths lest any harm befall them; and in this manner the galloping troop, avoiding the mud puddles shaped by recent rain, rode up upon the lawn of the house before the wedding party had returned. The delicious odors that spread from the kitchen door and windows

A WEDDING FEAST

were a powerful magnetic force, but Luba kept off the soldiers by throwing out a handful of hard crackers and threatening them with a kettle of boiling water.

When the party arrived the Caucasians started dancing as a sign of peace and goodwill. They formed themselves in a large circle before the house and in their center a young lad bursting with vitality stood jumping about while the rest marked time with their hands and yelled cries of joy. The lad wore a long wine-colored coat with a wasplike waist belted with silver from which dangled a dagger with an ivory handle. The cartridge tubes lined across his breast were also tipped with ivory and his bright red boots flashed from under his dancing figure like the split tongue of a teased garden snake.

The children immediately invaded the long table beneath the shed and were about to remove the cakes and divide them with the Caucasians when the porter suddenly appeared and separated the children from future trouble. The servants now hurried back and forth between Luba's inferno and the shed piling food, plates, dishes, relishes, fruit, jams, and wines upon the boards until they creaked and sagged under the load.

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In the meantime congratulations were being received in the hall and the village folk draped themselves over the open windows from without so that they, too, might enjoy the spectacle. At one time Terenieff called a servant aside and ordered him to tell Luba not to make so much noise in the kitchen. But as soon as her banging and shouting eased off, a new racket began. The children, it seems, driven from the table had come upon the grazing donkey and with a rope around the poor beast's neck they were attempting to induce the animal to enter the house through a rear door. In fact, they had already, after a good deal of pushing and pulling, succeeded in getting the donkey's fore legs across the door-sill. It was then that their endeavor was discovered and their efforts checked.

With this disturbance removed the guests now turned their attention to food. The blue-eyed priest and his colleagues, whom he had taken the liberty to invite, were already waiting in the shed when the crowd arrived. But the table was not quite big enough, so the leader of the Caucasians called his men aside and proposed to Terenieff that they be served on the lawn. Accordingly two large table-cloths were spread upon the grass, their corners and

A WEDDING FEAST

sides held down by bottles of wine—and here the Caucasians were served, and from here they shouted their toasts in reply to those from the shed.

The bride did not eat very much, but soon retired to the house to change her dress. Some minutes later the groom, with Terenieff, also left the shed. A small carriage, hitched to three spirited horses stood waiting at the door. Now attired in traveling clothes, but still holding her small bridal bouquet, the bride hesitated a moment before she flung herself into her father's arms and received three parting kisses. Then they were off; Terenieff whipped out his pocket handkerchief and waved after them before wiping away a salty tear from the corners of his eyes, and returning to his guests. In the orchard the children were now taking turns at the gardener's cornet and their wet mournful tones were heard at the gate by the departing couple.

In the afternoon the men started several tables of cards in the hall and the women drank tea and spoke about precious gems in the dining-room.

The poor priest walked sadly between both centers of activity. The tea was with the

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women, the wine with the men. It was indeed hard to combine both, but he did well.

The soldiers now started singing and dancing with the aid of an accordion and a guitar. This lasted until evening when the young dancer suddenly grew frisky, and running his pony at a gallop jumped upon the saddle, making a gesture as though he were capturing a bride for himself in primitive fashion. Then a little accident happened, for while he was standing on the saddle with his bright red boots the horse ran too near a tree and the branches brushed off the rider.

The soldiers ran to the spot and lifted him from the ground, but he was soon upon his own feet. He was more shaken than hurt but felt disinclined for any further dancing.

Then the leader of the troop, after a brief conference with two of his men, walked over to the house and asked for Terenieff. The priest was in the hallway between the two rooms as Terenieff came to the door.

"An accident has happened, Master," said the Caucasian. "Nothing serious in any way, only it seems to us—a bad omen. The horse stumbled, the rider fell . . . a bad omen."

"A bad omen!" repeated Terenieff.

A WEDDING FEAST

"Yes, it's a bad omen and we must sacrifice a lamb. The lamb can wash it clean."

"A lamb?" asked Terenieff surprised. "But surely that is a heathen custom," he appealed to the priest.

The priest, however, saw more food in prospect and replied, "No, no it is not heathen at all—the man is right, for was it not the sacrificed lamb that alone could open the sealed book?"

A fire was built while the chief of the Caucasians and the priest went to sacrifice a lamb. Soon they returned with a good-sized sheep properly slaughtered, and set it on a pole over the open fire that now blazed, a fiery gap in the darkening sky. In the kitchen Luba shouted, "What a lot of dirt there will be!" A fresh keg of wine was donated by Terenieff to help wash clean the bad omen.

The bridal carriage rolled on. The driver cracked his whip over the three galloping horses' flanks as the groom seated beside his bride called to him, "Don't spare the horses, driver!"

The bride sat motionless gazing blankly at the swift moving road beneath her. Now the ground seemed yellow, now dark brown with pools of the recent rain and again there were

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places that in the setting sun glowed red. Red, as though the rust of cast-off chains had stained the soil.

Her arm holding the bouquet hung limply out of the side of the carriage and a flower or two rubbed against the spokes of the wheel.

Presently she glanced up to see the road ahead, watched for the next approaching puddle, and when the horses struck with a splash, she let fall her flowers.

She let fall her flowers into the mud.

LADY LOTTO

LADY LOTTO

THREE years ago a rich American lady arrived in Italy. She was tall, slim, and dressed in black and never joined in any of the functions of the American colony in Rome. It was said she was in mourning for her husband and could not be invited anywhere. During the first six months she lived in five different hotels but to her they seemed all uncomfortable. Then she moved to Florence and from there to Rapallo where she rented a cottage some distance from the city. An old peasant and his wife took care of the place. In addition a gardener was hired to work all day long in the enclosed yard. Plants and flowers were set out in masses. Those that did not thrive were quickly replaced regardless of cost.

In the evening and sometimes very late at night the pale lady was seen walking among the flowers in the yard. Her health was poor and seemed to decline. The simple peasant woman recommended a doctor, the gardener

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too ventured to give his advice and the old peasant recommended a certain kind of wine that was made in Capri and had great medicinal properties.

After a month or two her walks in the garden grew less frequent and she spent the greater part of her time in bed. The old lady cooked tempting dishes but she ate none of them and the gardener now neglected his yard. At length she was dying and sent for the priest.

Candles were lit before the image of Mary. Their yellow light moved faint shadows across the bed. Her hair was spread out behind her. The fever burnt deeper. Her right hand clutched the sheets and with her left she pressed a wooden crucifix between her hot breasts. The little carved image of Christ glowed warm at her heart.

The priest entered but her eyes gazed steadily at the burning candles as she spoke with rapid breath.

"Mercy. Pray for mercy, Father. The three years that I have been here were filled with terror and torment. Pray for mercy."

In silence he prayed while she pressed the little carved crucifix tightly against her bosom.

"We were never happy. But only God knows how I have suffered since. I was young when

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I was married and we did not have a peaceful moment together. I killed him, Father. I killed a snake in the grass but the sting remained to poison my soul."

The priest mumbled his prayers. She continued to gaze at the candles.

"He wanted money. I should have given it. I should have given all. All and more. We were about to separate. But his demands exceeded reasonable bounds. He moved back into the house. He said he was going to temper my spirit . . . 'to open the ducts of generosity.' I held firm. His presence was discomfoting. Annoying. He tried to extract the sums. He promised to go away and never return. But his demands seemed too much and I decided to leave the house . . . leave everything and go.

"That night he was away at his club. I had the trunks brought down. Spring was in the air. The windows were open while I packed. It was midnight before I went to bed. The next day would have seen me off. The servants were instructed; everything was ready: I soon fell asleep.

"In the late night I was awakened. Someone was in the room. At first I feared to move. I could see a bulky shadow cast upon the wall.

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Then I saw someone bending over the dressing table. Slowly my hand moved to the wall. For a moment I hesitated—long enough to gather courage. Then I pressed the button and flooded the room with light. Something heavy fell to the floor.

"The thief was surprised. His revolver fell. 'I wouldn't harm you, lady,' he said. 'Don't yell—I wouldn't harm you.' I picked up the weapon to protect myself. He raised his arms and backed into a corner. 'I wouldn't harm you lady,' he repeated.

"Slowly I moved toward the telephone. I was strong; I was tense; I was able to carry on. Suddenly it occurred to me that he might have been sent to threaten and harass me—to prevent my going away. I questioned him. But he was only a common thief; I could ring for the police. But I needed time to think.

"He stood waiting in the corner. In one hand I held the revolver. The newspapers the next day would have been filled with the story and I wanted no publicity. I wanted only to go away. Quietly. I was packed and it was my only chance. My plans would be ruined. . . . I decided to let him go. I told him so. He mumbled something I couldn't understand. He was bewildered. It looked as though he

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wanted to drop to his knees and pray. But he feared to move. He was about to leave when suddenly the front door banged. A heavy foot climbed the stair . . . returning from his club.

"The door was half-open. You could see by his eyes that he had been drinking. For a moment he stood looking at me. A sinister smile crept into his face. 'Pardon me, my dear,' he said, 'I did not know you were entertaining—in your nightgown.'

" 'Enough! I have had enough of this,' I cried. And with that I fired twice. He fell to the floor.

" 'You killed him, lady. You killed him,' stuttered the thief. 'I killed a snake in the grass,' I shouted. Everything grew dim. The room began to spin before my eyes. I could hear voices outside. I tried to steady myself by reaching out to the bedpost. But I could not take hold. I fainted.

"In the hospital—I tore my clothes and shrieked. For three weeks I was strapped to the bed. Slowly the news was broken. The thief had confessed to the crime. But the crime hung—like a millstone around my neck. I was silent. For weeks I was silent to the outside world. But all the time—a volcano

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raged in my soul. The sea, I thought, would do me good. The fresh air would clear my thoughts . . . brace my reason. But the waves that battered the sides of the ship—dashed against my nerves. I landed here meaning to gather strength—to return. To return with the truth . . . to cut the load from my throat. But I was weakened by fear . . . feebled by a terror that blew a tempest through my conscience. It shattered my soul to fragments.

“Each year, each month, week, every day—I struggled to return. O God! To confess! To be light and free. A hundred letters I began—but the thought choked my body . . . choked. . . . And desperation tore them . . . into thousands of shreds. Tore shreds. . . . Pray for mercy. Mercy for my soul.”

As the little lights burnt low, as the shadow of the image of Mary crept higher upon the wall until it seemed to fill out and embrace. . . .

Now she breathed more rapidly. The little cross at her breast she clutched tightly. It heaved up and down as though it were a wave tossed spar. In an effort to gain more air her body raised itself so that it rested only on the heels and head. Her black hair splashed across

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the pillow. Her eyes stared at the lights. And they remained staring long after she was dead.

* * * *

Behind bars of iron worn to a polish by caloused hands, in a cell of stone walls and upon iron shelves called cots lay two prisoners. The day's task was done and welcome night was deep upon the prison, liberating captive souls through dreams. Only now and then the shadow of a rat dared cross the bar streaked floor of the cell.

"Are you sleeping, Nort?"

"No."

"I just woke, Nort, and I had a dream about the lady."

"What lady?"

"Your lady."

"Don't know any lady."

"Sure I dreamed about the lady that you tells me about—the one with the rings. And now I know that you told me truth."

"Did she come to take me out?"

"Yes I dreamed she came here and I could see her plain as day. She came to take you out. She was looking for you. I could see her way down the corridor and knew she was looking for you. I tried to signal to her

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through the gate but she did not see. Her head was back and her lips moved as though she were calling your name. She held her hands before her and at first I thought it was a lamp she was holding but then as she came nearer I could see that the light came from her hands. Like that fire that cuts iron . . . almost blind you.

"She held them out straight before her and everything melted before them. She walked through the bars of every cell and soon she walked out again. She was looking for you. I wanted to call out but I couldn't. You were asleep on the upper cot and I kept on repeating to myself: 'Here he is lady. Here he is. Here he is.' But I could not make her know."

"Why did you do that?"

"I don't know. That's how it was in the dream. I thought if I kept repeating, 'Here he is,' she would know where to look for you. She kept on from cell to cell. For a moment all would be dark until she returned to the corridor. Her hands blazed a light that cut through everything. She was coming closer and closer. It was hard to see her eyes but I kept repeating, 'Here he is. Here he is.' Then I heard her silk dress rustle; it sounded like walking on dead leaves and I backed to the

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wall and raised my arm so that when she looked in she would see that I was pointing to you. There I stood; and it seemed a long time. I held my arm out straight and stiff and at last the place lit up like a ballroom. There she stood.

"I kept pointing to you but I could not make her look at you. Her lips moved and said softly, 'Where is he.' Then I answered polite as I could, 'Lady there are no men in this place.' My arm was no longer pointing to you."

"Why did you say that?"

"I don't know—that was the way it was in the dream. 'Lady there are no men in this place'—And then she says 'What are you then?'—And I answers, polite as I could, 'Lady we are numbers.'—'Numbers?' she said.—'Yes, Lady, we are all numbers. He is number 846 and me, . . . my number is 339.'"

"What did she say when you said that?"

"She said—'I must see him, number 846.' And I asked what for, and then she said 'I come to take him out—see, I come to take him away' . . . And when she said this she took a ring off her finger and throws it away, and I hollered—'It's gold lady, don't do that!' And

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she says, 'What is gold to me if I am not free? I want number 846.' Then I said, polite as I could—'Don't take him away from me, lady—don't leave me alone.' And she says, 'Well, all right, I'll play you for him' and with that her hands blazed up with a terrific hiss and she walked right through the bars.

"Then the light died down again and she sat at the edge of the bed and opened a large board. I was frightened but I sat down and held the edge of the board. You were asleep over us and we could hear you breathe. She paused for a moment and took another ring off her finger and threw it into the corridor. 'It's gold lady! Don't do that . . . it is not right to throw gold away.' She shrugged her shoulders and said 'All right we will play,'—and we began playing."

"Cards?"

"No! Lotto."

"Lotto?"

"Yes it's the truth. We sat in the dream like a couple of kids and played lotto. From a black silk hand-bag she produced the wooden chips and the little glass squares. She also had a little gold purse that she kept on the corner of the board. From time to time as we played, I could see her take a little handker-

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chief out of the gold purse and press it to her lips.

"I could see all the numbers plain as day on the board and I could see my number and I found your number, and she had the wooden chips on the bed and she calls them off one by one. The first she called was number 677 and I let it pass; then she called 629 and I told her, polite as I could, that the number was dead. And she called another dead number, 801, that was Mike who died last year of coughing fits, and soon I discovered that nearly all the numbers on the board, exceptin' yours and mine were dead numbers and then I got scared and says—'Lady, they are all dead numbers!'—And she answered—'No numbers are dead.'

"She kept right on calling out the numbers and pressing the handkerchief to her lips. You were asleep over us and I tried to listen but I could no longer hear you breathe. She kept on calling the numbers; all dead numbers and I got afraid and looked her in the eye and said—'Lady what are you—are you real or are you ghost?' And as she turned to look at me I shook like a leaf for I could see by her look that I was dead . . . and you were also dead.

"Then I slowly got up from the bed and

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backed into the corner and again pointed to you. She did not stir but kept on calling the numbers. 'Is he dead?' I cried. 'Is he dead?' She paused, broke one of the glass markers with her fingers and cast the pieces to the floor. I could see by the way she tossed the bits off that I was dead and you were dead. And I trembled and shook all over—and woke up."

The river mist clung to the prison-walls. Soon the rays of unwelcome dawn would catch the iron bars worn to a polish—polished by eager hands. The rats hurried back to their holes.

EN ROUTE

EN ROUTE

THE trans-Siberian Express was most uncomfortable, yet it rolled on and on pretending that its wheels were not flat and that it had plenty of oil. Dust blew across the fertile Siberian plains and much of it stole its passage on the train, as though it, too, were needed in Petrograd.

We left Novo-Nikolaievsk in the morning and were now nearing Omsk ready for supper if the station had any provided. From the windows we could see that Omsk was not to be outdone by the smaller Siberian stations. She, too, had sewn together nine red handkerchiefs and floated the flag of the revolution from her masts. The buildings about the town were decorated with similar flags. It really did not matter that the cloth was salmon or magenta, or pink or vermilion, or even mauve as long as it remained on the red side. On the side of revolution.

As the train came to a full stop and many of

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the passengers hurried to the station dining room, two soldiers who had been camping on the platform gathered their belongings, including a tin kettle, and approached the train.

"Ivan," said the one holding the kettle, "we may sit on the steps or even stretch out in the vestibule, but it will take the devil himself to put us off this time."

"What, throw me off?" replied the other. "A fire, that's what I said. They will have to build a fire under me even to roll me off. Four days in this town is enough; and Petrograd waiting for us! Almost a month ago we were invited to come and share with the Revolution. Like brothers they invited us."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Don't think I am talking about my own brother, but it's Petrograd who invites us like a brother. If you can't read, it's no fault of mine."

"If you didn't read so many papers that were stale," replied the soldier with the kettle, "then things would be pleasanter for us all. Brothers or no brothers, I hope we get to Petrograd and that they will have some good food for us, but if they don't then they are no brothers of mine. Not for an hour will I allow them to be my brothers."

EN ROUTE

"You're a fool! Of course, when papers are stale they lose their fire, but in Petrograd I will show you what a fresh newspaper is like. You have no idea. You stand by a big machine, big as a locomotive, but no smoke (the Americans are devils) and suddenly it starts like a big animal, sick with colic. It rolls its ears and turns a hundred eyes and vomits folded newspapers as though there were no end to its indigestion. And the papers are hot like white bread and you smell the delicate spirits with which the ink is mixed, and there is electricity in every sheet. And the machine hardly stops from one day to another; she just sits and vomits. How can you compare a paper that is two weeks old with a fresh one?"

"Do I compare anything, Ivan? I merely ask what right has a newspaper to make me a brother of a city. What right has it?"

With these words the two soldiers had placed their bags on the platform of the train and were making themselves comfortable on the steps when the conductor with his neat uniform and commanding air appeared. Without the slightest introduction Ivan pounded the butt of his rifle on the steps, struck a challenging attitude and cried:

"We don't care if you are a conductor or a

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general. We are sons of the Revolution and we are going to Petrograd and the devil himself will have to build a fire under us to get us off."

"Ho-ho," and the conductor waved his hand. "Who wants to put you off? Did I say anything? Do I care if you sit on the steps? Do the passengers care if I don't, and will the engine object to two more? What difference will two more make? Do you think I would throw my brothers off a train because they had no tickets? Is it my train? No, of course not! Then what are you fellows hollering about?"

"We are no brothers," replied the soldier with the kettle. "They haven't a right to make me a brother if I don't want it. I am Nick, and you are a Conductor, and he is Ivan, and Petrograd is a city, and my brother is dead."

"Don't mind him," laughed Ivan, changing his attitude toward the conductor. "He has a large box of cigarettes and resents becoming a brother of so large a city as Petrograd."

"My poor children," said the conductor with a very solemn air, "if the train had a little less trouble I would shed a tear for you two. Here you are, going to Petrograd thinking that they invite you to come and eat caviar, when in

EN ROUTE

reality (and I know because I was there) it is black bread buttered with trouble. You will see for yourself. Only yesterday we had a telegram that they were shooting again in the streets. If you call this brotherly, you will see it for yourself.

“And do you think it is so pleasant on the train? We have with us a general, who is a man of high rank and whose name appears in every paper at least once a week. He is not afraid of the greatest cannon, but he fears Petrograd. We have with us three ladies and hardly a day passes that they do not weep. Yesterday they cried because Siberia was so big and devoured so many of our best people, and now, just before we came into Omsk, I had them pull down the shades so they would not catch a view of the garrison where eight hundred prisoners were confined at one time and where our Dostoievsky wrote his ‘Memoirs from a Dead House.’ A dead house it was indeed and if the ladies ever saw it, they would have cried for a week. If children cry it’s different and if a man cries there is always a way to fix it, but if women weep in one car and the general complains in another, and the flies eat up the dining car, and people sleep in the corridors, and the doctor’s dog yelps all night,

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is it a wonder that the train is two days late? Everybody was in a hurry to get to Petrograd, yet now no one would object if we remained here a day or so and found out who was shooting who in the streets and what the trouble was."

The soldiers sat on the steps in meditation as the station bell rang twice; at last Nicholas spoke:

"You see how you can believe the papers. It's better not to read at all. Now that we are here, we know at least where we are, but where are we if we get to Petrograd and they start shooting? Besides, I discovered a man here who is good for a pound of tea at least every two weeks; and who will collect it when I am gone? And the prospects I had in mind these past two days are better than all your newspaper brothers. Now, here, if I find a runaway German in the woods, I talk to him with my hands and strike a bargain. How do you think I got those two watches we sold last week? Did you think I stole them? No, I struck a bargain. In fact, I have always had a natural talent for trading. What the devil will we do in Petrograd? Can you strike a bargain if they are busy shooting, and can you get two silver watches from brothers?"

EN ROUTE

Ivan, pretending he was angry, now grasped the kettle and dragged his sack from the train.

"What kind of a dog do you think I am? Here we wait four days for a train and receive the consent of the conductor and the invitation from the capital and we are not started yet, but you resent the journey. As for myself, I can't say I like to hear women weep nor do I care for shooting in the streets."

"I haven't heard such good sense in a long time," said the conductor.

The bell struck three times, the soldiers dragged their belongings to the rail of the platform, the conductor mounted the steps and waved them farewell.

"Good-by!—I'll be back in a week and will bring you regards from your brothers."

"Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

IN A RUSSIAN TEA-HOUSE

IN A RUSSIAN TEA-HOUSE

A TEA-HOUSE in Petrograd during the Revolution was a clearing-house for the events of the day. You entered, sat down, and talked to anyone you pleased in a most democratic fashion; and it was a sporting proposition, too, for the man you talked with might be prime minister next week. When tea was served, you took your own sugar from your pocket, and, if you could afford it, gave a bit as a peace-offering to your heavily armed soldier neighbor or your loquacious friend. Conversation never dragged. It died out only when traveling minstrels, often in uniform, wandered in to entertain their comrades. Some of them were talented, and the story of the man who rose "from tea-house to opera-house" was a commonplace. The spirit of their entertainment was as devoid of commercialism as could be; the hat was seldom, if ever, passed about, but you contributed if you chose. In every restaurant and tea-house you found large

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placards which read, "Our patrons will kindly not insult their fellow-citizens who happen to be waiters by offering them tips."

A small group was seated about a large central table one dismal afternoon when the conversation changed as mildly as the wind from the care of horses to law and order.

"Crime and punishment is a subject we know very little about," said an officer in the group. "We have progressed in everything else. We have revolutionized the world a hundred times in the last century in science, in art, in industry; but the silly laws of Solomon remain unchanged. I do not mean merely the laws of Solomon; I mean the whole legal system. For instance, a reasonable man would say, 'The more enlightened a people, the fewer laws they require; but it works out just the other way. If a man has a rotten appendix, he has it cut out; but if society has a bad law, it is amended with another, and so we keep piling up laws until it takes seven judges and twenty-one lawyers to find out whether a man is guilty or innocent. As no man can be innocent with so many laws outstanding, he is almost always found guilty. That is, if the lawyers and judges have had the proper training and can

IN A RUSSIAN TEA-HOUSE

lay their fingers directly on the correct sections of the code."

He paused a moment to pour himself another glass of tea, and as nobody seemed to object to anything he had said, he continued with more confidence :

"But punishment is a different story. We punish people because they do not obey the laws or because, either from stupidity or ignorance, they do not know the law; then the way we punish them is to put them in such a position that they won't be able either to obey or learn the laws. Prison or Siberia! Many people say that the punishment is more serious than the crime. Certainly I think it is more ridiculous."

"No, but we are improving in that way," interrupted a soldier; "for instance, there was a gunner in our regiment who was a very fine fellow and one of our crack shots. After the first year he had charge of a machine-gun, and he certainly made it whistle. A fine fellow, but always with a troubled look on his face. 'Too much killing,' I said to him one day, 'is good neither for the soul nor for the complexion.' But that wasn't what bothered him; it was more serious. His wife was flirting with other men, and he was of a jealous nature and could not

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bear it. He would get up in the morning and, sitting on the edge of the cot, with a boot in one hand, become absorbed in thought, and I would often hear him mumble, 'Yes, I love her; but she will die—she will die.'

"Well, to make a long story short, she did; he killed her. It was when he had two weeks' leave, and he was returning with a St. George Cross for bravery. When he came home he forgave her at first. I accidentally met them in a restaurant, eating supper, and they were the gayest couple you ever saw; but a black cloud must have crossed their horizon, for in the middle of the night he shot her through the heart. He was a crack shot."

"It's cruel of you to say that," interrupted one of the company.

"Not at all," said the soldier, "if you knew how he suffered. It all came out in the trial. I was one of the witnesses, and so was his wife's mother. She defended him. It was all very interesting and would have been amusing had it not been that my friend, after facing death fearlessly for two years at the front, before an enemy armed to the teeth, was now facing death before his own countrymen, armed with beautiful leather-bound books and documents.

IN A RUSSIAN TEA-HOUSE

"He would have gone to Siberia for life had this not happened just after the Revolution. The revolutionary court did not know the laws, and the man who defended him was a friend and not a lawyer. His friend was very clever. In summing up he said: 'Here is a comrade before you charged with murder. If ever a man was guilty, he is. The objection I have is that you charge him with only one murder, his last. He has been murdering for over two years; and, what is more, he has been killing people in cold blood. Those he killed in cold blood were individually innocent, although collectively, I admit, they are a pest. But my friend is not accused of these crimes at all. He is accused of killing the woman who betrayed his love, sold his home, and starved his baby; killing her not in cold blood, but in the heat of passion. For killing hundreds of people that he did not know he was awarded a cross of honor, but for killing a snake who was once a woman and his wife he is brought here in the clutches of justice. My friend is guilty, and we shall not attempt to squirm out of the charges confronting him; but I must ask the court, I must insist, that the charge be corrected to read, "Charged with murder of two thousand men and one prostitute."'

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"Then the judge got up and spoke. 'Comrades and friends,' he said, 'this is a strange case, and it pleases me greatly to see that professional lawyers are not participating. A good lawyer would divert the issue to the psychology of momentary mania or to the unwritten law. To me the case is simple. Human life has become of little value; it is a pity. We have enlisted this man, now a prisoner, to defend our country against invaders, and we must realize that he is forced to kill to do his duty. We have instructed him in the art which he has practiced these last two years, and now we ought not object if he happens to kill someone in a rage. This talk about crime against a society or nation differing from crime against a person is beyond me. I must confess that I see little difference, excepting that in one case the prisoner has had our permission and sanction, while in the other no one asked him to do wrong. Both cases are bad, but to say that one is worse than the other appears ridiculous. At any rate, should there be any real difference, it would be so slight that either to reward a man for one or exile him for the other appears to me too extreme.

" 'In the conference we just held it was suggested that this act and similar ones, if there

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should be any, should not be encouraged, and that to insure against this a minor penalty be inflicted; but one of my comrades suggested that in view of the fact that we are assured of the love the prisoner had for his wife, her loss, which he could have averted, is nature's punishment, with which we ought not to interfere.'

"At this moment," said the soldier, as he took a little sip of tea to moisten his throat—"at this moment," he repeated, "my friend, the prisoner, broke down and cried like a child, and I, too, would have cried if I had not been ashamed of him; and the judge continued:

"'It is a pity that human life has become so undervalued. It is our duty to try to restore it to its former condition and make it even more sacred. However, it is the opinion of the court that this cannot be done by inflicting the same crime the prisoners are guilty of upon the prisoners themselves. If we deprive this man of his life, we are guilty of a crime similar to his. This is not the way to get people to respect human life. Something different will have to be devised, something more natural than the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The prisoner is therefore freed, and ordered to return to his regiment.'

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"It seems the judge was right, as our comrade suffered greatly over the loss of his wife; in fact, so much that his hand grew unsteady, especially when sighting his gun. His face was always sad, and there was often a far-away gaze in his eyes even under strong enemy fire. I warned him several times to be careful or they would puncture him some day when he stopped to look into space. And so they did. The poor devil! They got him; and it wasn't quite fair to shoot a gazing man.

"We lost one of our best men. The morning after we buried him an officer, sneering at me, said: 'Say, old man, why is your face so long? Are you still mourning for the murderer?'

"The words, 'the murderer,' got under my skin and ate like acid into my flesh. I was boiling with rage, and hit him such a crack in the face that it shook his teeth. Of course I was arrested, but the general only shook his head sadly and released me. I think he must have known my friend.

"Our comrade here is right; we know very little about crime and punishment; but you will all agree that it isn't quite fair to shoot a gazing man."

Only the clinking of tumblers being washed behind a partition disturbed the silence which

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now invaded the tea-house. An old man in a corner shook his head as though to say, "Such stories stir nothing within me, for something has long been broken." The officer at the central table took an envelope from his pocket containing a few lumps of sugar, and there were many calls for tea as the minstrels struck up a plaintive melody.

THE
POLITICAL HORSE

THE POLITICAL HORSE

AHORSE sat down in the middle of a street in Petrograd and wouldn't get up. Do what you would, he remained as though rooted to Hell.

The shafts of the wagon, still attached to the harness, stood up at a foolish angle. Beating the animal did no good, so the next best thing was to unfasten the harness and push back the wagon. This we all helped to do. We then formed a circle around the beast and advised one another as to the best way of getting him up or shifting him over so that the traffic of the street could pass.

Several members from the Newspaper Men's Coöperative Store, which was just opposite, joined us as we decided upon mass attack. Two of our strongest took hold of the stout part of the dirty white tail, and two of our tallest took hold of the upper mane and nostrils, and at the signal: "Hup!" they pulled while we kicked the beast in the belly from all sides.

"Hup!" once more, and: "Hup!" the third

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time, but it did no good. It only seemed to fix the beast more solidly on the pavement.

We rested awhile and then tried to roll the beast over, everyone pushing on one side, but the horse had planted his shoes firmly in the soft pavement. It was impossible to budge him.

After we had again rested a bit we decided to lift him bodily, but we could succeed in bringing up only the fore part, which we held as long as we could; then down it went as we let it go. A crowd was gathering. The driver grew angry and attempted to fight the horse all by himself while we were resting. He kicked him and beat him; he punched him and pulled his hair, but the beast only rolled his cowish eyes. The driver soon grew tired and left off.

Well, as we could not succeed with violence, we decided upon other methods. We placed a box of oats a yard or so in front of the animal. He pricked up his nostrils for a moment and caught the scent, but refused to do more.

Then we tried petting him. We stroked his mane from both sides and petted his neck and rubbed his nose and slapped his ribs and fed him sugar and spoke kind words to him.

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"Nice horsie, good horsie, nice horsie. Get up like a nice fellow. Come, little pony, nice little pony."

It almost helped, he was just about to move when the driver forgot himself and shouted:

"You low-down beast—get up!"

That ended it. Down went the spirits of the horse and again all was lost; even the four lumps of sugar.

We decided finally that it was of no use and the only weapon we had left to use was—starvation. We would starve the beast until he stood upon his legs, realizing also that the more we starved him, the less would he be able to stand on his legs.

The driver of a motor car, thinking our circle a political discussion, blew his horn as he headed straight for the crowd. We stepped aside, leaving the horse in view. The car with its big brass lamps went very near to the stubborn beast before slowing down. This the horse did not at all like, so he rapidly got up.

"Hurry," we shouted as we quickly ran the cart up to the beast and strapped the two together.

"Keep the auto here or he'll sit down again," someone shouted.

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But the driver was already on the box and off went the horse and wagon at a good pace.

The next morning the following variation appeared in a leading newspaper of Petrograd, written by one of the well-known satirists. It was entitled: A Fable!

In a Socialistic Commune that believed neither in violence nor force, a man sat down in the middle of the street and refused to get up. The traffic was stopped.

Nothing could induce him to move. The four tram cars, all that the town possessed, stood idle. His best friend, the blacksmith, was called and asked to lend his aid. Approaching the obstacle, he asked:

"Ivan, how long have we been friends?"

The seated man refused to reply.

"It's eleven years, is it not, Ivan?"

"Well, what of it?" asked Ivan.

"Well, if that is true, then you ought to have more sense. If you have the little sense I think you have, you will move your soap-box a bit to the side and let the trolley cars go past."

"No! I won't!"

"Just listen to reason a minute, Ivan. If the trolley cars can't go, then no wagons will

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be broken and I shall have no repairing to do and my wife and children will have nothing to eat. Come now, be a good man, move your box and allow the wagons to be broken."

"No, I won't!"

"Listen to me, Ivan. Tomorrow I must go to the cemetery and it will cost me three rubles for a horse and wagon and I shall have to feed the horse besides, all because the trolley can't go. And why can't it go? Because my best friend sits on its tracks. Move your soap-box over a little and let me trolley to the cemetery tomorrow."

"No, I won't!"

Nothing helped. Ivan continued to sit like a bearded Buddha with his cap on one side of the box and a piece of bread tied in a handkerchief on the other. Evening came on and the cars were backed into the barn. Ivan stretched over the tracks, covered himself with his coat, put his head in the box, and went to sleep.

In the morning he found many pennies and other coins in his hat, but he threw these to the children, who were indeed happy at the sight of a man camping on the tracks.

At ten the three directors of the Com-

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munity Car Service held a meeting, after which they approached Ivan. Said the secretary:

"We, the directors of the Community Car Service, have decided that no man, woman, or child has the right to interfere with the franchise granted us by the community, to run cars through this street for a period of twenty years. Inasmuch as we have been in service only for three years, we come to ask you to wait aside for seventeen years before resuming your obstruction."

"I am not sitting on your franchise," said Ivan, "I am sitting on my own box."

"But your box is set on our tracks."

"Well, move your tracks," advised Ivan.

"I never thought of that," replied the secretary, as he turned to consult with the other directors.

"If we move the tracks," said one, "what is to prevent him from moving his box?"

"We'll do it this way," said the secretary. "We'll build a siding at least six feet from the main line and if he sits on one, the cars will run on the other. And as he is less than six feet tall, he cannot occupy both at one time."

And so it was decided; work was at once started. The mayor of the town dug the first spadeful and the spade was later bandaged

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with a red ribbon and hung on a wall in the city hall.

Ivan sat on his box and watched the whole process. The workingmen left their coats in his charge as they worked on the siding and for this convenience they shared their food with Ivan.

The next day some of the impatient people tried to frighten Ivan off the box. The fire brigade was called out and as they ran past shouted:

"Hurry, Ivan! Your house and store are burning. Hurry!"

But Ivan sat firm on his box.

The real reason why Ivan was sitting on the box was because he had quarreled with his wife. He had asserted his individuality, and in reply his wife had turned over a bowl of soup on his head.

The next day Ivan's wife thought that her husband had been away long enough, so she called upon the blacksmith to fetch Ivan, who, she supposed, was playing checkers, as the smith and Ivan always did after quarreling with their wives. But this time she was told of a new Ivan, Ivan the terrible obstacle.

The driving of the last few spikes into the ties was a great ceremony and Ivan would very

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much have liked to take part. He thought to himself: "If I had only been a better fellow they would have let me hammer a spike. But then, were I a better fellow, there would be no siding and therefore no spikes to hammer!"

Suddenly he saw his wife coming down the street with anger in her eyes and nothing in her hands. Ivan quickly left his box and went to the siding, where he mingled with the crowd. With one good spring the barrel figure of Ivan's wife pounded upon the box and splintered it to bits. Only one board was saved and this the wife held firmly aloft as she ran Ivan home.

The day after this fable appeared in the newspaper the long awaited changes in the cabinet took place. Two of the conservative ministers were removed for obstructive tactics.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE FREE?

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE FREE?

AFTER the usual breakfast he was taken downstairs, given a bath, a fresh suit of civil clothes and brought to the office. Here he was presented with several documents and a five dollar bill. The warden got up from his desk. "I see by your papers, Joe, that you have been here twelve years. Well, you have been a good prisoner; good-by and good luck to you." They shook hands.

He was led through the yard to the gate. The moment had come. He stepped through. Again they shook hands before the gate was closed behind him and locked. . . . Locking him free.

He carried his hat in his hand as he started along the road and down the hill. He was confronted by a fresh bracing breeze and a most bewildering sense of vastness; a vastness bathed in light. His eyes blinked and his steps were short and hesitating.

On the top of the high gray wall a guard,

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rifle in hand, walked in the same direction. "Good-by, Joe," he shouted, "How does it feel to be free?"

How does it feel to be free? . . . To be confined, bottled-up, held in check, restricted, controlled—and suddenly turned loose upon a dizzy world!

A gray mist rolls in like a wave. Imagine yourself completely enveloped as though your life had been becalmed by a fog. A fog through which it is difficult to see. Only overhead can you see a tiny circular opening through which the bright sky shines like a sparkling jewel. Soon you discover that the mist has hardened about you. The fog has encased you completely, except for that far away opening overhead. You examine the walls and find that they are composed of long narrow ribbons of gray celluloid hung from what appears to be a small hoop in the sky. No, you have more space than that. Your walls are round, but you have ten feet from side to side . . . and every side is alike. From the sky to the ground your life is encased in a celluloid tube made of cold gray ribbons and you are unable to see what is outside of yourself.

But when you examine the walls closer you

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find that the strips are made entirely of little squares and each square has a queer design. You had not noticed them at first, but everywhere you look and as far up as you can see, you find the little squares. Then on examining them closer you discover that each square is a separate little picture in which you yourself appear! Each square a frozen moment of your life. Each picture a tiny recollection dimmed and made gray by that rapid piling-up—that multiplication called past.

Frozen memories in miniature . . . as though the ribbons were discarded cinematographic records—records of your discarded past—complete and shameless.

There are different scenes of long ago; some are comforting and some are horrid. At some you tarry, but others you are happy not to see at all. Those high up are hard to see, though some seem clear and fairly distinct. You make vague guesses at what they are and some you are sure you recognize. It is like a game. The forgotten past hangs over you as high as you can see and a circle of light comes through from the sky.

The whole thing is quite natural and at first you see nothing very strange about the affair; a little odd, perhaps, or maybe like a dream,

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but it does not seem very startling until suddenly you discover that the sequence is wrong. Why should it be wrong? Why do the scenes not follow one another as they happened? Why is this thing all shelter-skelter? You try to select and arrange but the task is enormous. Here and there and everywhere are pictures that you have not included and some that you would like to . . . If you could only cut them away with a pen-knife. . . . Yes, cut little toy windows so you could see clearly outside. The outside world. The real world that at present you can see only by looking through your own experiences, and see dimmed by the shadows of past images. But you have no knife that could sever. . . . And it would not help.

Oh, how tired you are of it all! How dreary, how oppressing, how monotonous! Days are gray and nights are gray. You are tired of yourself, . . . the constant repetition of yourself. If you could only run away. But the cylinder is light, airy and nimble. It rotates as you run. You are imprisoned in this strange thing called life—life dreary and gray—surrounded by cameos and smudges of black.

The sequence is wrong. You try to escape. The walls are pliable and with pressure could yield. You wedge a hand through, and an-

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other; you work a foot through, making still another opening, but at no time can you manage to get your body through. Then, too, where would you go? You give it up and in time you are resigned and engage in that restful ploy of thinking back and of looking out at the real world through the lightly tinted squares.

You see the world. . . . The real world that is made of kisses and snow. Of fire, milk, dreams, straw, water, tobacco and children. You watch the real world that is built solidly of things that do not last; built firmly of vital sparks that cannot endure.

Every now and then you discover a new square or two added to your walls. Something that happened only yesterday; but what was in its place before, you are unable to tell try hard as you may. In a year many different pictures have presented themselves. In three years a fair number are new, in six, three-quarters are added pictures, but in twelve hardly any of the old remain and these seem greatly dimmed. A comforting dimness. Time makes all things restful.

In the outside world you can see children playing. They are playing with matches, lighting old brooms and paper and running across

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the fields with trailing flames and shooting sparks. They had never done this before.

You watch closely. They are putting fire to the whole business! Suddenly a flash—a puff of smoke—a blaze of light and there you stand on a hill confronted by real colors and a free bracing breeze. In the distance the frightened children are running and you hear one whimper, "I did not know it could burn."

Everything is sky and land. You are surrounded by a vastness bathed in light. You blink at the glamour of it all, as with hesitating steps you wander down the road to . . . The station is a mile away. Here a train comes from somewhere and can take you to—exactly where you do not know but it can take you there. You must go!

That is how it feels to be free.

At the station Joe changed his five dollar bill to buy a ticket and a plug of chewing tobacco. The train carried him home; to the city of his former life.

The streets are paved with stone. . . . Square next to square with hardly a crack between. Cruelly mortised by men for the benefit and convenience of their fellow men. Long lives cemented together so that mud and dirt

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are not tracked about—tracked into the little pigeon-holes called home.

Joe reached home all right. His wife had been dead a number of years and his children had all grown up and married. Old memories were quite dim. He hardly knew them and they certainly did not recognize him; but it was all very pleasant.

In the evening they all had supper together, that is, after the babies had been put to bed in one room. The table was dressed as in a movie, the room was bright with lights and everything was merry.

A steaming duck was brought on and the oldest stood up, removed his coat and rolled up his cuffs before carving. "Now, dad, I am going to cut for you this here leg, first and second joint," and pointing the knife at him, "also a good big chunk of the breast. . . . Mollie, dish the gravy."

They spoke about the comic strips in the illustrated newspapers, about recent screen dramas, about dance-records for the phonograph, about everything that amused them. The checkered past was carefully avoided. They were all quite intelligent and they said they understood.

Joe had a nice home. He could stay about

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the house and just "rest up." The children had seen all kinds of reunions in the movies and would do their best to make him happy. They gave him a room to himself, a warm pair of carpet slippers, a pipe with a yellow stem and fancy gold band, a pair of cotton flannel pajamas, razor blades and everything that a male mortal needs for comfort.

But Joe spent a most uncomfortable night. The large meal did not agree with him and kept him awake. The rushing light of morn came blaring into the room. He looked about. Small photographs hung on the walls. There were scenes of Niagara Falls, Yellowstone Park and of big trees in California. Little gray squares dotted the walls—views that Joe had never experienced.

It was all very natural that Joe should be a bit uncomfortable at first. The children said they understood and that it would take a little while for him to really feel at home.

Joe proceeded to make himself comfortable. He tried the carpet slippers but found them loose, soft and uncomfortable. The pipe was a nice thing, too, though he did not really enjoy smoking. The pictures he removed from the walls into which he drove nails to hang his coat and pajamas. He greatly distrusted the closet

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where it was dark and where mice perhaps were free to wander.

He amused himself by collecting old bits of wire that he found on old picture frames and in the basement of the apartment house. It gave him great pleasure to send the wire down the neck of a bottle and watch the odd twists and coils it would make in the bottle . . . as though it were life itself going through its many painful convulsions. He kept the bottle on the open fire-escape in front of his window.

As soon as Joe found that the friendliness of his children was really genuine he proceeded to make himself really comfortable. He brought up some thin boards to slip under the mattress of the cot. This made it much firmer. He nailed up the closet door and painted the rods of the fire-escape black under the pretext that its former color showed the dirt too much. At night he had several times been bothered by a notion that there might be rats about and that his cot was too low. This he soon fixed by bringing up some old wood from the basement and raising the cot so that it resembled an upper berth in a cabin. He was careful to eat very little meat and kept closely to a diet of soup and hot cereal. Day by day he was feeling more comfortable. Now only one thing more

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needed his attention. The room was too large! Too large for one person. This he remedied by rigging a pole across the room and hanging down a heavy curtain dividing the space in half. It also divided the window. Now all seemed cozy.

By this time the bottle on the window was packed tight with bits of wire. He carried it down to the basement and broke it over an ash can. The heavy wad of iron wire was freed from its container. It was nothing but a rusty solid mass the same shape as the bottle that now was scattered in fragments.

He turned it in his hand and examined it closely. Was it an experiment that had failed? Did he imagine that the rough springy wires would jump back to their former state once freed? No. It was a rusty solid mass, brown as a cough mixture and shaped like a bottle. If he had a label he could paste it on and mark it, "Free!"

He brought it back to his room and carefully put it in its place on the window. Then he climbed up on his cot.

Outside it rains, and outside it snows and then the sun sings forth and dries up the long lines of pavements made of stone cunningly mortised. From his cot he can see a tiny bit of

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sky—a small bright opening far away. Now and then a figure walks across a neighboring roof and reminds him of the man on the high wall who held a rifle in his hand and shouted, “How does it feel to be free?” From his cot he can see glimpses of the outside world. The real world that is made of kisses and snow. But between him and the great outside is the window ledge upon which stands that rusty, packed-together wad of wire—shaped like a bottle.

THE END

FICTION Monroff, Manuel
KOMROFF Grace Of Lambs

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